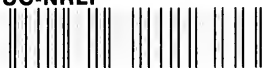
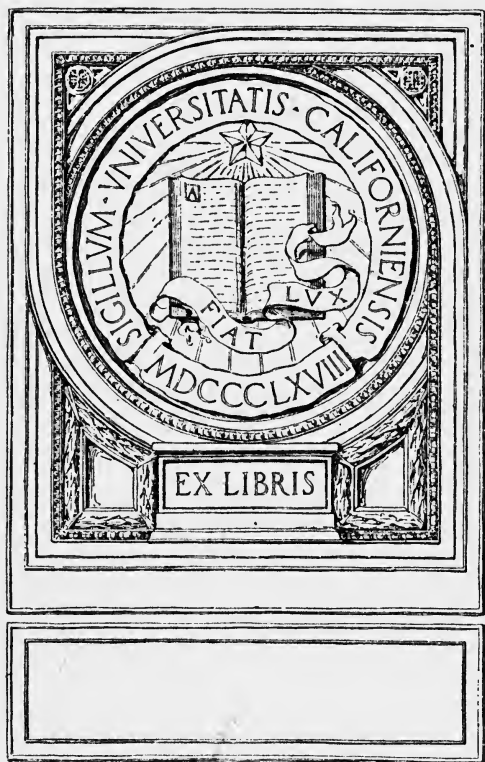


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FOUR SHORT PLAYS

OTHER PLAYS BY CHARLES FRED-
ERIC NIRDLINGER (*already published
or now in press*)

THE FIRST LADY OF THE LAND
(*Produced by Elsie Ferguson*)

THE WORLD AND HIS WIFE
(*Produced by William Faversham in the
United States, and by Martin Harvey in
London*)

THE CONSUL
(*Produced by Louis Mann*)

WASHINGTON'S FIRST DEFEAT
(*Produced by Arnold Daly*)

THE RUN OF THE CARDS
(*Produced by the Calburn Players*)

SPANGLES
(*Produced with William Elliott and
Georgia O'Ramey in leading rôles*)

MARION DE LORME (AN ADAPTATION)

MORE THAN QUEEN (AN ADAPTATION)
(*Produced by Julia Arthur*)

MADAME POMPADOUR
(*Produced by Sadie Martinot*)

THE SCANDAL AT BELCOURT'S

THE PARSON'S BALLET

THE POSTHUMOUS JEST OF DON MENDOZA

AN AFTERNOON'S HONEYMOON

FOUR SHORT PLAYS

LOOK AFTER LOUISE AN EVERYDAY TRAGEDY
BIG KATE / / / A DIPLOMATIC TRAGEDY
THE REAL PEOPLE / A SAWDUST TRAGEDY
AREN'T THEY WONDERS? A HOLIDAY TRAGEDY

BY
CHARLES FREDERIC NIRDLINGER



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
1916

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LOOK AFTER LOUISE

AN EVERYDAY TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HUGH STANHOPE

ERIC CRICHTON

LOUISE DRAYTON

JAMISON

LOOK AFTER LOUISE

SCENE I

The three episodes of the tragedy have for scene the living-room in Hugh Stanhope's apartment. Stanhope is rich, bachelor, about 35: and the room is furnished accordingly.

At rise of curtain, Eric Crichton, Louise Drayton and Stanhope are seated at small dining-table; Louise faces the audience, Crichton at right, Stanhope at left. The dinner has come to the point of sweets and fruit; coffee is making in a crystal percolator. Jamison, the servant, places cigars and cigarettes on table near Stanhope, then exits, with tray of plates, coverdishes, etc.

There is a slight pause.

CRICHTON (*offering his cigarette-case to Louise*)

Will you have one?

LOUISE (*formally*)

Thanks, no.

CRICHTON

Kind you like.

LOUISE

No, thank you. (*Turns to Stanhope*) Evidently Rhoda isn't coming.

STANHOPE

No, she didn't think she could get here; she just 'phoned from up town—somewhere—on the way to her sister's. They're leaving town in the morning—and Kitty may stay over night to see them off. If she doesn't, she's to phone before nine (*Looks at watch*) and I'll send the car for her. It's half-past now.

LOUISE

Sorry! I wanted so much to talk with her this evening.

CRICHTON

I'll take you up there, if you like.

LOUISE (*frostily*)

Thanks, no!

STANHOPE

What's wrong with you two?

LOUISE (*with elaborate indifference*)

Nothing! Why?

STANHOPE

You've been so terribly polite to each other since you came in. You usually hold hands or (*Glances under table*) touch toes.

LOUISE

My nerves *are* a bit upset, to-night.

CRICHTON

And for no reason that *I* can see.

LOUISE (*smiling: icily*)

You wouldn't, dear.

STANHOPE (*cheerily*)

Good! Have it out!

LOUISE (*touching Crichton's hand*)

Well, he *is* a dear—but he doesn't understand women—and never will!

CRICHTON (*piqued*)

I write about women. And some people say I do it rather well.

LOUISE

Yes, but the women you create—in your stories—deal only with gentlemen. And gentlemen don't understand women.

STANHOPE

Bromide!

LOUISE

No! I never saw a man yet—a *real* man—that understands.—Only men I ever saw who knew women—how to take 'em and how to handle 'em—were either brutes or bounders.

STANHOPE

Well, you *have* upset your nerves!

CRICHTON

And just from brooding over trifles.—Now it's got to end! I'm going South to-morrow—for three, four weeks—some magazine work—and I couldn't do it if I thought of you worried over such things—and lonely.—(*To Stanhope*) I'll leave it to you, Stan——

LOUISE

You will not!

CRICHTON

But on the way here, you agreed—

LOUISE

I thought Rhoda would be here—(*Indicates Stanhope*) He'd side with you, of course. You've no right to know, either of you.

CRICHTON

I can't help know, after what I heard at your apartment——

LOUISE (*sharply*)

You'd no right to hear.

CRICHTON

Tried not to, but—(*To Stanhope*) 'mong others—the man for the rent!—And that's always a very penetrating voice.

LOUISE (*plaintively*)

Don't talk about it, please.

CRICHTON (*insisting*)

But, my dear girl—we *must* talk.

LOUISE (*puts hand over ears*)

I won't listen—won't listen!

[*She leaves the table in a burst of temper, crosses to piano, and plays loudly. Crichton and Stanhope, in pantomime, continue the discussion. Then, after some seconds—during which Crichton takes cheque book from pocket and writes out a cheque—*

STANHOPE

Louise! He's quite right. (*She shakes her head "no"; continues playing*) Why not?

LOUISE (*talking over her shoulder*)

A woman can't accept—that sort of favor from the man she loves.

CRICHTON

But—why?

LOUISE

She just can't—daren't—mustn't!

CRICHTON (*insisting*)

Yes, but what reason?

LOUISE (*with crescendo on the piano-keys*)

Because! Because!! Because!!!

STANHOPE (*with mock gravity, imitating the crescendo*)

Three—perfectly—good reasons!

LOUISE (*playing more softly*)

It isn't a thing of reason, or logic, or sense: a woman just feels it—an intuition that warns her 'gainst——

You know about palmistry?

CRICHTON

A little.

LOUISE (*shows her palm*)

See that line? (*indicates it*) There! (*they peer at her palm*) That's the line of—well, of a “nice” woman.

STANHOPE (*illuminating it with his cigarette*)

Not very deep, is it?

LOUISE

No—you cynic!—it's tiny—a mere gossamer thread. (*to Stanhope*) Don't squeeze my hand—or it'll disappear, quite.—It's extremely sensitive, that line; responds to every trifle of a woman's life—the slightest act, or vagrant thought.

STANHOPE

Still, you have to pay your rent.

LOUISE

I shall in a minute! I'm to do the Japanese Room at Senator Spudds' new house—and Madame's boudoir—and they'll pay big.

CRICHTON

But Lord knows *when!* You know how those rich people are.

LOUISE (*livening*)

I'll ask for an advance!

STANHOPE (*disapproving*)

Then they'll know you *need* the work—and pay you half the job's worth.—Do as Eric says.

CRICHTON

There's no other way.

STANHOPE

Oh, yes, there is. (*Louise alert, plays very softly*)
And I'm rather hurt you haven't thought of me.

LOUISE (*turning from piano*)

You?—If I can't let Eric—who's everything in the world to me—how could I take it from you—who's nothing at all?

STANHOPE

That's the answer! (*Louise, unconvinced, resumes playing*) (*Stanhope insisting*) But you're going to marry Eric?

LOUISE

Yes.

STANHOPE

Well, you'd take it, if you were his wife.

LOUISE (*still playing*)

O, if I were his wife we'd be married . . . and that's very different from being in love. (*The two men exchange looks of amused surprise and laugh outright.*)

LOUISE (*hurrying on as she turns from piano*)

Well, you know what I mean! When you're married you don't bother about ideals and principles—and romance. But I wouldn't borrow from my husband—if still in love with him. My sister never does, she tells me. Because if she forgets to pay him back he's sore—and if he *lets* her pay him back, *she's* sore (*A 'phone rings outside*)

STANHOPE (*eagerly*)

That's probably Rhoda.

JAMISON (*at door*)

Mr. Winston—'phones to ask if you'll be at your club this evening?

STANHOPE

Yes. Did he say any particular time?

JAMISON

No, sir; just asked if you'd likely be there?

STANHOPE

Yes, tell him. (*Jamison exits*)

Poor chap's all in—since the break with Peggy—that heartless little——!

LOUISE (*triumphant*)

There you are!—Just what we're talking about—and right to the point. Winston and Peggy Deane!

STANHOPE

Ugh—that hoppy little flirt!

LOUISE

Yes, but hoppy about Winston—and his best model! till he spoiled it all—killed a beautiful romance with —(*disgusted*) shoes! Actually gave her *shoes*!

CRICHTON

She probably needed them—to walk in.

LOUISE (*assenting*)

She did—and *out*—(*gestures*) with some one else.

STANHOPE

Can't a man be kind to a woman he's in love with?

LOUISE

"Kind" perhaps—but not useful!

CRICHTON

We can't be pals as well as—?

LOUISE (*interrupting*)

Not at the same time!

CRICHTON

The things she *must* have, a girl must get, *somehow*.

LOUISE (*assenting* "yes")

And she *will*—but not from the man she cares for
(*indicates Crichton*) 'specially not intimate things—
to wear—like shoes.

STANHOPE

Now, come, you know what I think of Rhoda.

LOUISE

Yes, and she of you.

STANHOPE

Well, when I went abroad last spring, she had me
bring her some intimate things—gloves.

LOUISE

Evening gloves!

STANHOPE

And a coat.

LOUISE

Lace coat!

STANHOPE

Yes—and stockings.

LOUISE

Silk!—And that's different! She didn't absolutely *need* such things. She could live without silk stockings.

STANHOPE

Not Rhoda! She couldn't walk in anything but silk.

LOUISE (*nodding "yes"*)

And so made you take her cheque for everything you had brought—and cried her eyes out when she found you had never put the cheque in bank.

STANHOPE (*laughing*)

Yes, that was our first quarrel.

LOUISE

Well, we're not going to have any "first!" (*Catches Crichton trying to smuggle the cheque into her mesh-bag.*) What's that?

CRICHTON

A scrap of paper.

STANHOPE (*urging*)

And do be sensible!

CRICHTON

Just enough to see you through.

LOUISE

Probably all you have.

CRICHTON

But I'll have a lot more when my book's done, and meanwhile there's hack work, and something comes in.

LOUISE

Yes, and goes out—for dinner with me—and taxis—choc'lates and flowers.

CRICHTON (*persuadingly*)

But there'll be no more of that, till I get back.—
(*to Stanhope*) You'll look after Louise a bit, while
I'm gone? You and Rhoda?

STANHOPE

Sure!

LOUISE (*holds mesh-bag so that cheque drops out*)

No!—I couldn't touch it—nor look at it!—And
please don't think I'm not grateful—but you can't
understand how a woman feels. (*With feeling*)
Love is a tender, delicate, sensitive flower, and we
must guard it, jealously, from every possible hurt.

STANHOPE (*to Crichton*) (*indicating cheque*)

Tear that up, old man!

LOUISE (*triumphant*)

There!—*You* understand!

STANHOPE

Perfectly. (*To Crichton*) Go to the bank—and
put that amount to her credit.

LOUISE (*protesting*)

Oh, but—

STANHOPE (*continuing*)

You needn't touch it, nor look at it—except by
cheque.

LOUISE (*after a little hesitation*)

You're a—brute!

STANHOPE (*to Crichton*)

Settled!

LOUISE

But one thing I *insist* on: 'til I've paid it back, no
more taxis—chocolates—flowers—dinners. (*Crichton*
nods assent to each, except the last)

CRICHTON

O, but that's the best hour we have—dinner.

LOUISE

Then we'll dine at my place—chops, salad, coffee and fudge. And you'll not bring flowers.

CRICHTON

Oh, but—

LOUISE (*insisting*)

Not a penny pink!—Promise!

CRICHTON

You'd wilt without a rose or two on your desk.

LOUISE

Well, then, *one* rose—twice a week. (*The 'phone in hall rings.*) I hope that's Rhoda!

STANHOPE

No! She'd call *this* number. (*Indicates 'phone on desk*)

JAMISON (*at door*)

It's Mr. Winston again: asks when you'll be leaving for the club?

STANHOPE (*somewhat embarrassed*)

Well—I—

LOUISE (*rising*)

Go 'long!

STANHOPE (*to Jamison*)

Very soon, say. (*Jamison exits*) Poor Win!—But you needn't leave.

CRICHTON

We're going for a dance at the Biltmore.

STANHOPE

Wait till I get my keys—and I'll drop you there in the car.

LOUISE (*in alarm*)

No, no, don't bother.

STANHOPE

On my way, to the club. (*Exits*)

LOUISE (*quickly, in half whisper*)

He mustn't take us to the Biltmore!

CRICHTON

Why?

LOUISE

We might run into Rhoda.—She's going there—with Winston.

CRICHTON (*gasping*)

But—(*To Stanhope; re-entering*) Louise thinks she'd like to *walk* to the hotel, and get the air.

LOUISE (*wearily*)

Yes, you two've been too much for me with your arguments. (*Stanhope rings. Jamison enters with hats and coats. He helps Crichton into his and then goes up stage to door. Stanhope helps Louise into her coat*) (*To Stanhope:*) I shall hate myself for giving in—(*fiercely*) And I'll hate *you* worse for talking me into it. (*Exits angrily*)

CRICHTON (*grasps Stanhope's hand*)

Thanks!—And while I'm gone, do look after Louise a bit. (*Exits.*) (*Jamison re-enters*)

STANHOPE

Jamison—go to Hartley, the florist's, to-morrow—and have him send a dozen or so of 'Merican Beauties—to Miss Drayton—

JAMISON

With your card, sir?

STANHOPE

No, no.— And tell him, if there's any inquiry—he doesn't know who sends them.

JAMISON

Yes, sir.

STANHOPE

And, Jamison—tell him to send a nice box—two or three times a week—for the present. (*Rather to himself*) She's fond of roses.

JAMISON (*while helping Stanhope with coat*) They mostly are—Yes, sir.— I was thinking of going out myself, sir, unless— (*Hesitates*)

STANHOPE

Well?

JAMISON

I was thinking, possibly, you'd want me to stop home for the 'phone message.

STANHOPE (*perplexed*)

Whose?

JAMISON

I was thinking, possibly, Miss Rhoda might—

STANHOPE (*angrily*)

I don't pay you to think, Jamison. I couldn't afford to! (*Exits.*)

[*Jamison, after hearing the outer door close, critically selects half a dozen of the best roses in the vase, with some of the "asparagus"; ties, and wraps them in tissue paper, turns off all the electric lights except one. Exits.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(TWO MONTHS LATER.)

At rise of curtain the room is in the gloom of winter dusk, save for the light of the fireplace, into which Stanhope stares moodily, frowningly; he has in his hand a silver-framed photograph of Rhoda, at which he glances occasionally.

Jamison enters silently, and makes to turn on the lights, but noting Stanhope's sombre posture, pauses.

JAMISON

Shall I turn on light, sir?

STANHOPE (*gruffly*)

Dark enough, isn't it? (*Hurriedly lays photograph aside*)

JAMISON (*as he lights a lamp here and there*)

Yes, sir; but I was thinking possibly you might be—thinking.

STANHOPE (*with temper*)

I *was* thinking—of giving you a month's notice.

JAMISON (*gratefully*)

I'm entitled to only a week's, sir. (*Stanhope jams on hat, seizes gloves and stick from table*) (*Jamison sets Rhoda's photo upright*) You dining in, sir?

STANHOPE

Bah! (*Makes to exit by door back*)

JAMISON (*intervening*)

Better go *this* way. (*Indicates door at left*)

STANHOPE

Why?

JAMISON (*in low tone*)

Mr. Crichton's there. (*Nods toward hall, back*)

STANHOPE

Ask him to walk in.

JAMISON (*in low tone*)

I'm 'fraid, sir, he's been drinking.

STANHOPE

Can't he *walk*?

JAMISON

Yes, sir, but he seems terribly upset—excited—and (*mysterious*) he has a—well, I'm thinking it's a box of flowers.

STANHOPE (*with gesture of dismissal*)

Show him in. (*Puts down stick and gloves, throws hat on chair. Jamison exits. Crichton enters, lug-ging a long, purple florist's carton, with rose-stems protruding. Nods curtly and puts into Stanhope's outstretched hand an unsealed envelope.*)

STANHOPE

What's that?

CRICHTON

Your bill, from Hartley's.

STANHOPE

What you doing with it?

CRICHTON

I paid it.— That's the receipt—including these. (*Indicates flowers*) They were just going out. I said I'd take 'em along.

STANHOPE (*looking at tag*)

But they're addressed to—

CRICHTON (*jumping in*)

Most of 'em were—in that account.

STANHOPE (*frowning*)

But I don't like what you've done.

CRICHTON

Neither do I—seeing I had to do it by *trick*. Went there and asked for Mr. Stanhope's bill—*itemized*—(*points to bill*) That shows where most of 'em went—and—(*distracted*) Stan, old man, I just *had* to know who was sending 'em!

STANHOPE

You had only to ask me. (*Kindly*) And, my dear boy, that's a rather *fine* bill.— You can't afford to pay such a—

CRICHTON (*with spirit*)

I can't afford to let *you* pay it!

STANHOPE

If you feel that way, of course.—(*Sincerely*) I wouldn't hurt you for the finest bill in the world, nor the finest girl.— I meant, of course, for Louise to think *you* were sending them.

CRICHTON

She *did!* *Accused* me of sending them—and breaking my promise.— For a time after I got back we never spoke of the flowers—but when I saw her rooms kept like a—a prima-donna's boudoir—I asked “who's the man?”—A mistake, of course!—but I couldn't stand it any longer! Then I found she thought I'd been sending them—they came without a card—and I couldn't convince her it wasn't me. She vowed she'd refuse to accept them any more. I couldn't have that—you know how she loves them!

—and we had a quarrel—our first!—because I suggested it might be *you* sending them.—She said you'd certainly have put in your card—"Why not?"—and insisted she'd turn 'em back—the next ones.—That's how I came to go there—and wouldn't let them send these.

STANHOPE

I *am* sorry!—But I remembered how she made you promise to cut out all such—attentions—(*Points to roses*) I knew how she'd miss them.—(*Ruefully*) And as I can't send to Rhoda any more, I—I—well, it was a sort of comfort to send 'em to Louise.— You asked me to look after her a bit.

CRICHTON (*with nod "yes"*)

And you've been bully—she *told* me—asked her to lunch—and matinées—and sent your car 'round.

STANHOPE

But she never had time for anything—'cept dinner one night at Longview, and used the car 'casionally.

CRICHTON

That job for Senator Spudds!—She's put in every minute—and it's got on her nerves—maybe?

STANHOPE

Most likely.

CRICHTON (*unhappily*)

O, she isn't the same girl.—Not to me.—Changed in every way—tone of her voice—very expression of her eyes when she looks at me.

STANHOPE (*laughing*)

You just imagine.

CRICHTON (*despairingly*)

Hell, no!

STANHOPE

Well, what makes you think—? What has she done—or said—?

CRICHTON

Nothing—nothing—that you can lay your hands on!— But you know you can—tell—always when it's "cold."

STANHOPE (*shakes his head "no"*)

Not till it knocks you cold, sometimes—as it did me that night, two months ago, when I just happened into the Biltmore and ran into Rhoda with Winston. (*Laughing at his own discomfiture*) "Poor Win"!—whom I waited for at the club till midnight—so I might cheer him up! (*Reminiscent*) Not a sign till then—'cept she'd be late at appointments—and careless—or snippy—about explaining.

CRICHTON (*brightening*)

Not Louise! Formerly, if she kept me waiting, she didn't speak of it, at all. We both knew it couldn't be helped—and didn't waste time over it.—But *now* she takes pains to explain, and excuse—when I question her.

STANHOPE (*encouragingly*)

There you are!—And you go about together as before?

CRICHTON (*bitterly*)

No! Cheap restaurants—when it isn't a snack at her place;—the "sub," 'stead of taxi's—soda-fountains 'stead of Maillard's.—No more plays.—Movies!—A scrap, last evening, 'cause I suggested dinner at Longview!—She'll have nothing as before—says that was the agreement—till she's paid that loan.

STANHOPE (*approving*)

Loyal to her ideals, and a "good pal"!

CRICHTON

I don't want her for "pal"!—That's all right 'tween her and a friend—like you—but if it came to that—and Louise is only my "pal"—why—I'd—I'd—well, when Rhoda broke with you—you know what you said!

STANHOPE (*assenting*)

But you notice I'm still here to tell you—what I said.— Stop here and dine with me.

CRICHTON

No, please!—I'd be thinking every second of the night she sat there—(*points to table*) and fought 'gainst that damned cheque—warned me of the very thing that's happened—

STANHOPE (*consolingly*)

Nothing's happened.

CRICHTON (*despairingly*)

Ah! (*Turns to go*)

STANHOPE (*intervening*)

Come! You're not fit to be alone to-night—neither am I. We'll dine at the club; then go to the play.— I've sent for seats.

CRICHTON

No—I must get back to my rooms! Louise said she'd 'phone—maybe.

STANHOPE

Tell them to say you're here. (*Starts to lift 'phone.*)

CRICHTON (*nervously*)

No, no, they might forget—or mix things up—and I'd miss the call.—I'll go wait for it.—And drag her out to some jolly show. You come 'long and tell her about the roses.

STANHOPE

No! Best be by yourselves to-night.

CRICHTON

Perhaps, yes! (*Turns to go.*) (*Jamison enters, with significant promptness.*)

STANHOPE (*indicating the box of roses*)

What'll I do with these?

CRICHTON

Give them to the next girl that calls—with my compliments. (*Moves to door back*)

JAMISON (*intervening*)

This way, sir. (Shows Crichton out at left.) (Stanhope at door, watches him off. Comes down, shaking his head in troubled thought; looks at the flower box, then takes a card from pocket-case and writes on it.)

STANHOPE (*to Jamison re-entering, indicating box of flowers*)

Take those over to Gainsboro Studios—with this—(*Gives card*)

JAMISON

She's here, sir—been waiting.

STANHOPE

Why didn't you show her in?

JAMISON (*significantly*)

Well, I thought, sir——

STANHOPE

You *think* entirely too much!—Put 'em in a vase.
(*Jamison exits with the roses. Stanhope hurriedly puts the photograph of Rhoda in desk-drawer.*)

SCENE III.

Louise comes in; none too fitly clad for the wintry storm, in coat and jacket of serge, and skimpy furs; but she is buoyant, aglow, a tune on her lips.

STANHOPE

You're happy!

LOUISE

Dangerously!—(*Half-whispers*) It's over.

STANHOPE (*troubled*)

What!

LOUISE

That horrid affair with Eric—my debt!

STANHOPE (*relieved*)

Oh!

LOUISE

I put the amount to his credit, at the bank to-day.
—And I couldn't rest 'til I told you!

STANHOPE

That means I'm forgiven—for talking you into it?

LOUISE

Of course! You've been the sweetest, dearest fellow through it all.—How can I ever make it up to you?

STANHOPE

I'd do anything for Eric.

LOUISE

And so would I. He's proved himself a real pal—poor kid!—I told him how kind you'd been, while he was gone.

STANHOPE

I tried to be;—he said to look after you, a bit; but you wouldn't give me a chance.

LOUISE

I didn't think it right—under the circumstances; Eric away—and my obligation to him.—O, I wanted to, often, you may be sure.—All I could do, at times, to turn down Sherry's—the "Follies" and another ride to Longview—like the one we had that moonlight night.—And that's just it, you see!—why a woman *hates* that sort of obligation; it keeps her from doing the things she'd like to do—and makes her want to do them just because she shouldn't.—Why, if I hadn't felt that way about Eric—and what he did for me—I'd have dined with you, gone to theatre—used your car—and never give a second thought to it—nor to *you*, either!

STANHOPE

Eric wouldn't mind, I'm sure.

LOUISE (*with a little laugh*)

He "minded" your roses.

STANHOPE (*startled*)

My—? How'd you know? From Eric?

LOUISE (*"no"*)

From the *nice* way you did it.—I knew all along it was *you*.

STANHOPE

Then I *didn't* manage so very well.—I meant you to think they came from him.

LOUISE

And all along I've made Eric think I thought so.—I scolded him, for his reckless extravagance, and breaking his word.—We actually quarreled because he denied he'd sent them.

STANHOPE (*rather reprovingly*)

But if you knew, why didn't you tell him?

LOUISE

Because he asked! He never did that before—never questioned me about anything.—And I thought he was presuming on—and anyway, he wouldn't understand.

STANHOPE

Yes, he will. Tell him you were just "teasing".—Go over to him—or call him up. (*Points to 'phone*)

LOUISE (*nervously*)

No! Not now—to-morrow—after he's been to the bank.—I'd rather not see him till then—(*Wearily*) I want to be alone this evening—quite by myself. (*Falls into chair in front of fire, with half-closed eyes*) Just a few minutes in this cosy chair, and I'll run away.—(*Peering into fireplace*) You do have the nicest fires! (*Touches her tearful eyes, and sniffles*)

STANHOPE

What's wrong, girl? Nothing to worry about now.

LOUISE (*"yes"—tears in the voice*)

Eric! I've been cross with him—impatient—un-

grateful.—He's unhappy, of course—and I'm so sorry!

STANHOPE (*pleased*)

Good!

LOUISE (*ruefully*)

To be sorry for a man? (*Shakes her head*) Bad!—
And the worst of it is—no one's to blame: it just happens.

STANHOPE (*laughing it off*)

That's a mood!—Your work's got on your nerves
—the Japanese room for Senator Spudds!

LOUISE

That wasn't so hard—but the Louis Quinze boudoir for Mrs. Spudds!— (*Gesture of despair*) And these shabby gloves (*Extends hand which Stanhope pats platonically*) and shabby hat and shabby shoes—and all the dinners in shabby places for nearly two months— (*Joyously*) But it's over, thank Heaven!—and Spudds! I'm free—of debt, obligation—free of everything!—If I were a man I s'pose I'd c-c-celebrate.

STANHOPE

Happily you're not—so I'll call the car—

LOUISE (*all alive*)

Yes—?

STANHOPE (*continuing*)

—Send you home—and you'll snuggle into bed for a good, long sleep.—And the moment you wake up, 'phone Eric come take you to— (*Enter Jamison, with tall vase of roses, which he places on table; then exits.*)

LOUISE

O, you're expecting some one. (*Rises*)

STANHOPE

No!

LOUISE (*indicating flowers*)

They mean *something*! (*Makes to go*)

STANHOPE (*intervening—"No"*)

Not what you mean,—and I rather dread dining alone to-night—I was going out—for dinner—and a show.

LOUISE

O, but such a horrid night!

STANHOPE

Yes. (*Rings. To Jamison who enters*) Jamison, any food in the house?

JAMISON (*deprecatingly*)

Quail, artichoke, endive, gervais and bar-le-duc—and I'm thinking some—

STANHOPE

That'll do. (*Dismissing him*)

LOUISE

Rather!

STANHOPE

And perhaps you'll feel like theatre, after a bit of food and—rest. (*Turns off some of the "electrics," till the room is in the soft light of the lamps*)

LOUISE (*with a purr of content*)

You *do* understand women, don't you?

STANHOPE (*shaking his head "no"*)

I didn't understand Rhoda.

LOUISE (*piqued*)

O, if you're going to talk about her—(*Makes as if to rise*)

STANHOPE (*quickly*)

No, no—I was only thinking—how different *you* are—

LOUISE

She's dark, and I'm blonde. That's all.

STANHOPE

No! You're frank—simple—direct. You're brave in your affections—firm in your ideals. And you'd hesitate a long time before you'd hurt the man who's loved you.—That's how you're different from Rhoda—delightfully different. That's why I envy Eric. (*Crosses to 'phone*)

LOUISE

Nonsense!

STANHOPE (*lifts 'phone: calls*)

"Bryant 1346."

LOUISE (*with some anger*)

Eric's number! What for? (*Jumps out of chair*)

STANHOPE (*matter of fact*)

Tell him come to dinner.

LOUISE (*quickly*)

I'm going. (*Stanhope restrains her by arm. Louise seizes the 'phone out of his hand. Stanhope is evidently pleased by her apparent surrender, pats her on the back.*) (*Louise talks*)—Hello!—Is that you, Eric? . . . No—I'm not at home! I'm 'phoning from up-town,—O, I don't know just where—it's a drug-store, I believe . . . No, I won't be back in time for dinner—you see how it's storming.—I'm

on my way to my sister's . . . O, no, dear, don't call for me,—such a dreadful night—and they're all upset.— They're packing—going to the country early to-morrow—and I may go with them, for a day or so.—Yes, I am horribly seedy.—Yes, I'll call you up if I go—to say—"good-bye"! (*Hangs up 'phone*) That's over! (*Sits at piano.*)

STANHOPE (*sadly*)

Evidently.

LOUISE (*with feeling*)

I can't help it! I'm sorry, but I can't help it.— I warned you both. I knew what would happen.

STANHOPE

But—it's unreasonable, illogical, inconsistent—in-human!

LOUISE (*nodding "yes"*)

That's the woman of it! (*Plays softly*)

STANHOPE (*slightingly*)

That may be true of a Peggy Deane! or even a Rhod—— (*Stops short, at reproving look from Louise. Sits by side, on piano bench*)

LOUISE (*with mischief*)

—We're all alike, except some have light hair, and some dark—and some wear silk, some don't—but "the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady—, sisters, under the skin"—and always have been.—That's how the trouble began. Adam was the gentleman who didn't understand—and Satan was the bounder who did! Eve wouldn't have touched the apple, if Adam hadn't started to be nice and kind to her—and fuss over her—seeing she had enough to eat—and pay rent—and didn't get her feet wet.—Satan

didn't bother—except for some airy persiflage about fruit-trees.—That's what made her curious—what *he* had up his sleeve. (*The door-knocker sounds, in hall. Louise and Stanhope show annoyance, and promptly rise. Jamison enters with tray on which are two cock-tail glasses and the silver mixer.*)

[NOTE: When the play is presented in Prohibition communities, or to audiences of young people, the "cock-tail," of course, must be omitted; instead Jamison will serve, in stem-glasses, grape-fruit with sherry and maraschino.]

STANHOPE

Who knocked?

JAMISON

Boy from the theatre—with seats.

STANHOPE

What row?

JAMISON (*innocently, as he pours cock-tails*)

I didn't look, sir—I sent them back— (*As the wind howls, and windows rattle*) Regular blizzard, sir—and with your cold, I was thinking—

STANHOPE (*dismissing him*)

All right! (*Jamison exits*)

LOUISE (*as she takes off her hat*)

Servants like Jamison just spoil you men for marriage: he thinks of everything.

CURTAIN

BIG KATE

A DIPLOMATIC TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

CATHARINE II Empress of Russia

NOEL VAUGHAN Lord Ribblesdale

XENIA Princess Dashkoff

CAPTAIN KHITROFF of the Royal Guard

VLAS

BIG KATE

The action passes in St. Petersburg, about 1780.

The scene is a room in the Winter Palace, at St. Petersburg. The decorations and furniture are in the style of Louis XIV. At back, left, double doors open on corridor. At back, right, a large French window looks out on the Nevskii Prospekt, in a snow-covered landscape. On the back-drop, beyond, is seen the house of the British Embassy; in the which, toward the end of the action, lights appear. Down stage right, is a piano; left, a table. Near the French window is a screen. The time is late afternoon; the scene is lighted by many candles. At rise of curtain—and for a few seconds before—there is music, and the buzz of women's chatter. A number of court-ladies are concluding a lively minuet, led and directed by Catharine. Khitroff enters by door, right, followed by the servant, Vlas.

VLAS (*at door*)

Monsieur Vaughan.

KHITROFF (*to Catharine*)

Le maître d' Anglais

CATHARINE (*correcting*)

No! No!—Ingleesh; spik always Ingleesh!—So I learn queeck.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

The teacher—of—English, Your Majesty.

CATHARINE

Admit the school-master. (*Servant exits. Catharine exits, followed by court-ladies, all laughing and chatting animatedly. Two or three of them linger, in curiosity, for a look at the "school-master." Khitroff, gruffly, makes to close the door, or draw the portières, to hurry them off. Enter Vaughan; he is notably good-looking, tall, lithe and stalwart. His clothes are dark; of inexpensive stuff, but trim fit. He carries a school-boy's knap-sack, and a large umbrella. He is followed by the footman, with a silver tray on which are several school-books. The books intended for the use of Catharine are elegantly bound. Servant, at nod from Khitroff, places tray on table at R. of stage; then, as he recrosses, makes to take Vaughan's umbrella.*)

VAUGHAN (*clutching it*)

No, thanks—I might forget it. (*Servant exits. Vaughan drops his great-coat on chair near screen; crosses to fireplace to warm his hands.*) B-r-r! (*Shudders.*)

KHITROFF (*with decided accent*)

COLT?

VAUGHAN

Rather!

KHITROFF

Got-damn?

VAUGHAN

I shouldn't say that.

KHITROFF

Engleesh? All-right?—Not—

VAUGHAN

Quite!—Where'd you learn all your English, Captain? You speak like a native.

KHITROFF

Two year I serve with Engleesh general—Got-damn—in Riga. Now I speak here always Engleesh with the Empress.

VAUGHAN

Her Majesty should learn quickly 'tween you and me.

KHITROFF

Got damn! (*Servant re-enters with tray on which is a bottle of wine and two goblets; as he pours the wine Khitroff questions him by a look. Servant nods "yes," and indicates one of the goblets by tapping it with bottle. Vaughan, at fireplace, sees the play in the mantel-mirror. Khitroff, indicating the drink:)* All right?

VAUGHAN (*assenting*)

Thanks. (*Makes to lift one of the goblets*)

KHITROFF (*intervening*)

Not! (*Takes that one and hands the other to Vaughan*)

VAUGHAN (*raising glass*)

Your health, Captain!

KHITROFF

Yours—Got-damn! (*Makes to drink*)

VAUGHAN

One moment (*Takes Khitroff's goblet and gives his own instead*)

KHITROFF (*disconcerted*)

Why you 'change?

VAUGHAN

An old custom, in my country, to show there's no hard feeling. (*Drinks*)

KHITROFF (*angrily; under his breath*)

Got-damn!—(*Makes to throw goblet across the room.*) You theenk—? (*Towers above Vaughan threateningly*)

VAUGHAN (*interrupting*)

No, no—not *you*, Captain—but that footman; I mistrust—he wants my umbrella. (*The Princess Dashkoff re-enters. She scarcely notices Vaughan, except for a slight nod which he answers with a deep bow. Khitroff eyes them closely, with obvious suspicion; then exits to corridor, back. Vaughan instantly makes to approach Xenia, eagerly, but she cautions him away with a gesture, and nods toward Khitroff. Catharine's voice heard off in laughter.*)

VAUGHAN

Her Majesty's in good spirits to-day.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Very!—and for the first time since Lanskoï's death.

VAUGHAN

That means a new favorite.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*assenting*)

Two! (*Holds up two fingers*)

VAUGHAN

Two?—Touching tribute to Lanskoï, who preceded them.—She seemed inconsolable.—Swore she was done with love.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

So she's taken a fancy to marry.

VAUGHAN

"Marry"? Good Lord!—What a passion she has for novelty!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Talks of nothing else!—Makes no secret of it, to the court—that she's going to take a husband.

VAUGHAN

She's always been taking husbands!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Yes, but this time, one of her own.

VAUGHAN

But what of Potemkin—and her other ministers? They won't allow—

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

"Allow" Catharine?—They'd be glad so long as she marries some fool—who won't interfere in matters of State.

VAUGHAN

At her age—she's sure to pick a fool.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Khitroff—for example?

VAUGHAN

Khitroff!—That impudent, swaggering, uncouth ruffian!—with his bull-neck!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*assenting*)

That may save you!

VAUGHAN (*amazed*)

"Save me"?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*nods "yes"*)

If she takes Khitroff! (*Signals caution as Khitroff walks to and fro in corridor.*)

VAUGHAN

You're not serious?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Tout-à-fait!—She wants a husband and children—twenty, she says.—And unless something offers more to her taste, you or Khitroff get the ruby. (*Taps her thumb*)

VAUGHAN (*perplexed*)

"Get the ruby"?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Her thumb-ring—with the square ruby. Her first gift, always, to the new favorite. (*Wistfully*) She's remarked your fine hand.

VAUGHAN

Good Lord! (*Shoves right hand in pocket; stares blankly into space*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Of course, 'twill be only a *left hand* marriage. (*Vaughan shoves left hand in pocket*) Your children won't inherit the crown.

VAUGHAN (*bewildered*)

Pinch me—I'm dreaming.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Wake up! 'Cause you'll need all your wits—to get out of this!

VAUGHAN

I'll get out now— (*Takes up his great-coat, as if to go*) and you with me.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

We'd never reach the palace gate—together—with Khitroff on guard.

VAUGHAN

And Khitroff knows that I'm his—rival?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Certainly!

VAUGHAN

I see—"Got-damn!" (*Staggered*) What on earth can she see in—a school-master?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Novelty!

VAUGHAN

But you know it's—impossible!—ridiculous!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

O, I've told her—you were "ridiculous"; (*Laughing*) that you were dull, stupid, awkward,—cold-blooded—bookworm—and that you'd probably never yet made love to a woman.

VAUGHAN

That should cure her.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Contrary! Only made her curious.

VAUGHAN

I see!—You over-did it.— But wherever did she get the notion——?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Well, you have made love to her!

VAUGHAN

Everybody makes love to her.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Yes, but you over-did it! I told you all along you were over-doing it.

VAUGHAN

I'm playing for a big stake, and they advised, at the Embassy, a little flirting would help.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Then let the Embassy do it!

VAUGHAN

Sir Charles was willing, but his wife wouldn't risk it—with Catharine.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

She's right! You English can't "flirt"!

VAUGHAN

I shouldn't say that—(*Takes her in his arms*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*continuing*)

Italians, Frenchmen, Russians, yes—even a Cos-sack, like Khitroff—has the "touch." But an Englishman goes at it hammer-and-tongs— (*Vaughan kisses her*) and keeps pounding at it— (*Vaughan kisses her again*) as though his life depended on it—and the woman's, too. (*Same business*) Any woman—who doesn't know their ways—would think he meant something by it—even a Catharine! (*Breathless between kisses*) I—know—how—you "flirt." (*Breaks away, as Catharine's voice is heard off. Takes up a school book and pretends to be absorbed in it when—Catharine re-enters; she is talking, pettingly, to three or four dogs—Boriz or Wolfhounds—which leap at the jewelled whip she cracks over them.*)

CATHARINE (*to the dogs*)

Potemkin, be good!—Beg, Orloff—implore! (*Caressingly*) Yes, yes, Lanskoi— (*Cracks whip*) Down, Zuboff—a-way!—weeth your dirty paws. (*Gestures servant to take dogs. The dogs exit. Catharine calls after them*) Be-have, Korsakoff! Poniatowski!—Got-damn! (*To Vaughan*) My good dogs I name for my good friends.

VAUGHAN

Your Majesty rewards virtue.

CATHARINE

And I speak weeth them Ingleesh, so I learn queeck. My ministers weesh I speak only Ingleesh weeth the British Ambassador. Then he will never understan' what I say.

VAUGHAN

No fault, I hope, of Your Majesty's school-master.

CATHARINE

No! No! You are—all right! (*To Princess Dashkoff*) Not, Princess?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*assents, with a shrug of derision*)

For—school-master!

VAUGHAN

Madame despises my calling?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*sneeringly*)

I suppose one must live.

CATHARINE

But why are you—school-master?

VAUGHAN (*with a wan smile and shrug*)

Because I am poor.

CATHARINE (*reprovingly*)

"Poor"?—weeth your big six feet—those fine, big hands—and your two big eyes!—You should be officer!

VAUGHAN

In my country—England—to be officer, one must have fortune.

CATHARINE (*with naïveté*)

That could come over night, once you are officer.—When Gregory Orloff enter my service he was the poorest Captain in the Guard.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*promptly*)

But the tallest.

CATHARINE

No! Korsakoff was taller—with his boots off.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*admiringly*)

And such a voice!—tenor!

VAUGHAN

Alas! I'm only barytone.

CATHARINE (*approvingly*)

'Tis the bes' for a man—barytone. An' go well weeth me. (*Indicates her throat*)

VAUGHAN (*quickly*)

But I scarcely know music.

CATHARINE

Like Lanskoï! He did not know one note! When I sing he could not turn the page of music.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*tearfully*)

But had only turned twenty years. (*Touches her eyes*)

CATHARINE (*same business*)

Poor boy! (*To Vaughan*) And you?

VAUGHAN (*quickly*)

Thirty!—Turning thirty—and— (*shows clean side of cuffs*) my *one* pair of lace cuffs!

CATHARINE (*re-assuringly*)

Like Poniatowski! He come to Court weeth his wardrobe in handkerchief—a lace ruff and three shirts. But just for that, we make him King of Poland.—And Potemkin, we see him first in Sergeant's blouse; but we change that queeck, for the diamond cloak of Ispahan—because he was brave and strong! Ees eet not so in your country?

VAUGHAN

Alas! Your Majesty, not since Queen Elizabeth!

CATHARINE

Ah, yes!—She have been for me—example;—she make the wish—the am-beesh—to be for Russia the —“big Kate”—like she for England the “large Lizzie”! (*Gesture of all-embracing majesty*)

VAUGHAN

Your Majesty has already surpassed her model.

CATHARINE

Tell us—you are school-master—her hair was red—like mine?

VAUGHAN

From all accounts—*redder*.

CATHARINE (*looks in mirror*)

Ta—ta—ta! And she never marry?

VAUGHAN

We call her the “Virgin Queen.”

CATHARINE (*sighing*)

Ah, poor woman! She deserve better from her coun-

try. (*Flaring*) But there were fine men in England! Could she not find some?—Soldiers—sailors?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*spitefully*)

Or even a school-master?

CATHARINE (*rebuking*)

Madame! (*Pounds table and gestures her to go*)

VAUGHAN (*entreating*)

Please! Your Majesty's defense of my calling touches me deeply—and, though the Princess, I fear, is spilling the beans—(*bows to Princess and winks*)—as we say in England—yet I would not give my rôle of school-master for the crown of Poland—the baton of Field-Marshal—nor all the gems of Ispahan! To the school-master I owe the glory of standing in your presence.—If Your Majesty will forgive my audacity (*Catharine smiles "Yes"*)—we'll begin—at once—"to love—" (*Takes lesson-book and ferule from knapsack*)

CATHARINE (*disappointed*)

Oh! (*The Princess Dashkoff gives Catharine a lesson book from the tray; takes one herself.*)

VAUGHAN (*tapping book with ferule*)

Second conjugation (*Reciting:*) "I love—Thou lovest—He loves." (*Looks to Catharine to begin*)

CATHARINE (*to Princess Dashkoff*)

Begin!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*she looks straight at Vaughan, while reciting; her voice and her eyes betray her:*)

"I love, Thou lovest.—He loves" (*This last rather to herself*) "We love—You love—They lo——"

CATHARINE (*sharply*)

But—you do not look in the book!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*a trifle disconcerted*)

I—I—was studying when Your Majesty came in.— And besides, I've already learned that.

CATHARINE

How you learn so more queeck as me?—You have always the same lesson weeth me. (*Flaring*) Or maybe you have private lesson—weeth Meester Vaughan?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

O, no, but Your Majesty forgets I was born in London—while my father was in the Embassy there.

CATHARINE

We were born in Germany, but—— You live in London how much?

VAUGHAN (*correcting*)

“How long?” Your Majesty.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Some years.

CATHARINE (*insisting*)

How some?

VAUGHAN (*correcting*)

How *many*—years, Your Maj——

CATHARINE (*angry; stamps her foot; beats table, with dog whip, whereupon Khitroff appears in corridor, back*)

No! no! no!—she understan'—How many some years?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Two—nearly.

CATHARINE (*as if quite enlightened*)

Oh!—Ten year we live in Germany (*Suddenly flar-*

ing)—aber wir sprechen doch nicht Deutsch, wie sie jetzt Englisch sprechen—Donnerwetter noch einmal!

VAUGHAN (*taps the lesson book, school-master fashion*)

English, Your Majesty, English! And please, *please*, ladies!—we're losing time.

CATHARINE (*reciting*)

"I love—Thou lov'st——"

VAUGHAN (*correcting*)

"Thou—lov-*est*—" Your Majesty—"Lov-*est*!"

CATHARINE (*with elaborate precision*)

"Thou—lov-*EST*!—Thou lov-*EST*!"— And you could ask that to a woman?—"thou—lov-*est*?"—Nevaire! Nevaire! (*Closes the book*) Tees no langwage—for love;—tees a mis-fortune!—"Thou—lov-*est*!"

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

Not so bad, Your Majesty, as German! "Ick liebe dick—Ick liebe dick." (*Pounds bass notes, on piano, to illustrate.*)

CATHARINE (*crossing to piano*)

Ah, but who will make German love, when you can say Italian? "T'amo tanto, di tutto mio cuore—da tutta mia via—da tutta mia anima—" (*Plays a tune of passion*) Or in French: (*Swerves to tune of languor, tenderness*) "Je t'aime—Je t'aime—avec toute mon âme—du fond de mon cœur—" etc. Or, best of all, Russian— (*Makes an elaborate expression of love, in Russian, accompanied by characteristic music: strange, exotic, bacchanalian—and all the time looking at Vaughan.*)

VAUGHAN (*quite unconcerned*)

And—"I love you"—in Russian—is all that?

CATHARINE

"All that"? Tees only the beginning.

VAUGHAN

I'll be dead before the finish! I—I—mean I never could learn that.

CATHARINE

But, yes!—Say after us: "I love you," (*in Russian*) (*Vaughan repeats the phrase, haltingly*) (*Khitroff, at door back, hears.*) "More than life I love you." (*In Russian*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

That means: More than life, I love you. (*Vaughan repeats the words. Khitroff looks on, in obvious rage.*)

CATHARINE (*applauding*)

All right! Ad-mir-able! We must re-ward the good pupil. (*Tries to remove ring from her thumb to the consternation of Vaughan and Princess Dashkoff*) (*After tugging at the ring*) Madame! (*Extends her hand to Princess Dashkoff, who makes effort to remove ring*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*faintly*)

I can't, Your Majesty.

CATHARINE

Khitroff is strong—Call him.

VAUGHAN (*in some alarm*)

Your Majesty—the will itself is reward beyond my wildest dreams—or my deserts. I've already forgotten the words.

CATHARINE (*to Princess Dashkoff*)

He must have practice.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

I'll see that he has—proper books.

CATHARINE

"Books"? That take long! Here—at court—he learn queeck.—We make him of the Guard! Officer! —Like Khitroff!—All right?

VAUGHAN (*bowing*)

With my King's consent!

CATHARINE

We arrange, with George.— 'Tees done! You are in my service—Sergeant Vaughan!

VAUGHAN (*disconcerted*)

But—Your Majesty—(*half kneels*)

CATHARINE

Pardon!—Lieutenant Vaughan!

VAUGHAN (*still kneeling*)

Impossible, Your Majesty!

CATHARINE

But why, Captain? (*Vaughan rises abruptly, fearing further promotion*)

VAUGHAN

Such a post—at Court—requires a fortune.

CATHARINE

That will come, we tell you—like weeth Orloff, Potemkin, Yermoloff, Galitzin, Zoritch,——

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*quickly in alarm*)

But they were soldiers, Your Majesty—not moon-shees!—big, strong men—like Khitroff.

CATHARINE (*nods toward Vaughan*)

He look big and strong. (*Vaughan instantly stands limp and collapsed*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

But they could ride, shoot, lance—fight, everything—like Khitroff.

CATHARINE

He will learn—in the Guard—ride—lance—fight and everything. (*Princess Dashkoff, convulsed with laughter at the idea, takes up Vaughan's knapsack and umbrella, and goes through mockery of a Cossack's attack on imaginary foe, using the umbrella as a lance, the knapsack for shield, with martial cries in French, Russian, English. Concludes with repeated thrusts at Vaughan, who falls back helplessly.*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*as she thrusts:*)

I love,—Captain!—Thou lov'st,—Major—He loves,—General!

CATHARINE (*in rage*)

Genug! Assez! (*Fires lesson book at Princess Dashkoff*) Potz-tausend! You make us ridicule?

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*sotto voce, to Catharine with audacity*)

He will!—Your Majesty honors me with every confidence—I should fail in my duty if I did not warn against the peril of this caprice—that “booby” in the Royal Guard—with men like Khitroff!

VAUGHAN

The truth, alas! I should cut a sorry figure—'gainst war-gods like Khitroff.—Let me serve for a while abroad: prove my deserts to a place near Your Majesty; win my spurs on the battlefield!

CATHARINE

But how?—where? We have no war.

VAUGHAN

We have—England.

CATHARINE (*assenting*)

In America—weeth your countrymen?

VAUGHAN

Rebels, your Majesty! And till we make example of them, every crown of Europe is in peril.

CATHARINE (*rather to herself: troubled*)

Gott-in-Himmel! (*Takes a pinch of snuff*)

VAUGHAN

Even Your Majesty's!

CATHARINE

Your King—he tell me that—and we should sell him ten thousand Cossacks to fight his rebels; but whatever cousin George say, we— (*Completes sentence by snuffing, with thumb on nose and twiddling fingers.*)

VAUGHAN

I shouldn't say that—not in this instance, Your Majesty.—For once, King George is right.—Though I think he rather underrates the Yankees when he asks ten thousand Cossacks.—I'd want twice that.

CATHARINE

Twenty thousand Cossacks!—But the Yankees are only a handful!

VAUGHAN

So we find, Your Majesty; *quite* a handful.

CATHARINE

General Washington, we hear, has, maybe 5,000 men.

VAUGHAN

Yes, Your Majesty, but like Washington, they are Englishmen.

CATHARINE

Then why not send *Englishmen* to fight them?

VAUGHAN

We've tried that, Your Majesty, but they're too soft-hearted for the job—our "red-coats."

CATHARINE

You have the "red-skins," too!

VAUGHAN (*assenting*)

Several tribes, Your Majesty.—But they're even softer-hearted than our soldiers.

CATHARINE

But they fight like devils—the Injuns!

VAUGHAN (*dissenting*)

They've been spoiled, Your Majesty, by civilization.

CATHARINE

Thank God, we have none of that in Russia.

VAUGHAN (*promptly*)

That's why we want the Cossacks! At any cost, Your Majesty. The German Sovereigns offer their troops—dirt cheap! The Graf von Braunschweig—Herzog von Anhalt-Dessau—Landgraf von Anspach-Baireuth.—And we can buy whole *herds* of Hessians!

CATHARINE

Take those!—Why not? They fight good—the Germans! Good enough to kill your people in America.

VAUGHAN

Yes, Your Majesty, but our people in England dis-

like to favor the Germans.— They've a grudge 'gainst them. You see, our sovereign, King George, is a German—(*Saluting*) God save him!

CATHARINE

Weeth my Cossacks?

VAUGHAN (*urging*)

The Yankees will run at sight of them—like scared rabbits! The unrest of subjects—such as already threatens in France—will end. The crowns of Europe be secured for centuries—to the ever-lasting glory of "Big Kate." To share in that achievement, Your Majesty, even as the humblest private, I'd gladly lay down my life—in America.

CATHARINE (*after a slight pause*)

But—you would go there—?

VAUGHAN (*bowing assent*)

To hell! If it serve Your Majesty.

CATHARINE

At present, no! To-morrow, maybe, I change my mind—and give you Cossacks. (*Rises*)

VAUGHAN

'Til to-morrow, I'm in heaven. (*Makes to go*)

CATHARINE

Then, to-night, we make fête! Come! We go, in sleigh, to Tsarkoi-Salo.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*nods toward rattling windows*)

To the country palace—in such a storm! (*Coughs*)

CATHARINE

Tees bad for you, yes! Remain here,—We go, Captain! (*Princess Dashkoff staggered: Vaughan smiles grimly*) (*Rings:*) We have tea—for make warm—and en-route Tsarkoi-Salo!

VAUGHAN

But, Your Majesty, my attire?

CATHARINE

To-morrow you have better—when you wake up. (*Servant enters with tea service of gold; serves the Empress and Princess Dashkoff. Then, at nod from Catharine, serves Vaughan, but from different tea-urn.*) (*Vaughan raises spoon to lips, but puts it down on a warning cough and glance from Princess Dashkoff. Servant watches them closely out of the corner of his eye. Khitroff, walking to and fro in corridor, takes in the scene.*)

SERVANT (*offering cream-pitcher*)

Crème, mi-lor? (*Vaughan pretends not to notice: turns away*) (*Servant: more pointedly, as he offers lemon:*) Citron, Mi-lor' Ribblesdale? (*Vaughan, startled for a second, recovers his poise and takes the slice of lemon. Princess Dashkoff, on contrary, utterly disconcerted, lets fall her cup.*)

CATHARINE (*amazed*)

Mi-lor' Ribblesdale!

VAUGHAN (*bowing*)

Your Majesty!

CATHARINE

The school-master is—gentleman?

VAUGHAN

Sometimes happens in my country.

CATHARINE

But in My country, gentleman does not make masquerade with his name!—That is for chenapan—escroc-coquin—what you say in Ingleesh—(*Lost for the word*)

VAUGHAN (*prompting her*)

"Rogue," Your Majesty—or "sharper"! But my name is really Noel Vaughan;—my title, Lord Ribblesdale.

CATHARINE (*to Princess Dashkoff*)

And you knew? (*Points to cup on floor*) But, of course, yes! Every one know! Khitroff—and the servant, *he* know! And the Court—they know—you make fool of me!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*protesting*)

Your Majesty—!

CATHARINE (*with increasing rage*)

One big damn fool!—weeth your "book-worm"—"moon-shee"—"scharfskopf"—"booby"! Mais *toujours* votre amant! And always you make love under my eyes—under my nose.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

And under Your Majesty's orders!—like Countess Bruce with Kersckoff—Madame Panin with Lanskoï—

CATHARINE. (*In a frenzy, seizes the dog whip, and approaches her. Vaughan steps between*)

Take off your—(*indicates waist*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*in tone of appeal*)

In God's name, Your Majesty!

CATHARINE

And you will bear the mark a year!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*calmly*)

Not one hour, Your Majesty! For in less than that I'd kill myself.

CATHARINE (*calling*)

Vlas! (*The servant appears at door*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*beaten*)

No!—I will. (*Servant withdraws, at gesture from Catharine*)

CATHARINE (*with rising wrath*)

Na-ked yourself! (*Princess Dashkoff looks to Vaughan, who makes to go. Catharine menacingly*)

No! Remain!—Queeck!

PRINCESS DASHKOFF

In his presence, no!

CATHARINE

Bah! Eet not the first time! In his presence you shall be whipped—or before half the court—like Countess Bruce! You prefer that? (*Raps on table twice with the whip. Khitroff enters*) Tout le monde! (*Khitroff turns to summon the courtiers*)

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*imploringly*)

No, I implore Your Majesty! (*Starts to unbutton waist*) I will obey. Only let me—— (*Makes to go into next room*)

CATHARINE. (*Points to screen in front of French Window*)

There! Since you are suddenly so modest. (*Princess Dashkoff goes behind screen. Khitroff resumes his post in the corridor. Catharine sits at table and writes. Vaughan, unseen by her, takes the dog whip, pulls lash from handle and throws it in fire-place. Catharine still writing*)

CATHARINE (*to Princess Dashkoff*)

Make queeck toilette, madame! You have long journey—and you will start at once.

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*from behind screen*)

Alone, Your Majesty?

CATHARINE

Khitroff will arrange—escort.

VAUGHAN (*to Catharine*)

It should include me!—I am to blame for all this.

CATHARINE

Mi-lor' Ribblesdale will leave Petersbourg to-night—

PRINCESS DASHKOFF (*from behind screen*)

Adieu, Mi-lord! (*Another garment hung on screen*)

CATHARINE (*continuing, in ominous tone*)

Or we give you—Cossacks, in the morning!

VAUGHAN (*sotto voce, with fervor*)

Till then, at your service (*as if about to embrace her*) most wonderful—adorable—of women! (*Seizes her hand*) Till to-morrow! Give me just those few moments of divinity—and nothing else matters—not life nor my immortal soul!

CATHARINE (*amazed*)

Thou lovest?

VAUGHAN (*rushing on*)

My one, poor excuse for the folly, the madness of this desperate trick! (*Picks up the school-book*) But only that I might approach you—be near you—day after day—and speak these words—and hear *you* say: “I love—Thou lovest—We love—You love—” over and over again—from those glorious lips—

CATHARINE (*drawing away slightly*)

But Lord Ribblesdale could speak what the school-master——

VAUGHAN (*breaking in*)

Vanity!—mad desire, Kate—my heart's caprice—to win, in this humble guise, the glory of the gods!

To make prevail, 'gainst every odd of rank and splendour, the power of my passion.

CATHARINE (*impressed*)

Thou lov-est, like that?—Got damn!

VAUGHAN

'Tis only the beginning!

CATHARINE

And she—there (*points to screen*) is nothing to you?

VAUGHAN (*with every show of sincerity*)

I love but one woman!

CATHARINE (*warningly*)

Eef you have lie, Milor'—!

VAUGHAN

Put me to the proof—Any test you like.

CATHARINE

Bon!—The test of Khorsakoff and Countess Bruce!

(*Calls*) Captain! (*Khitroff at door back enters*)

VAUGHAN (*uneasy*)

But I don't understand!

CATHARINE (*indicating the Princess*)

She understand! (*to Khitroff, and pointing to screen*) Debusquez!—(*Khitroff approaches screen.*)

VAUGHAN (*intervening, quickly*)

Not while I live!

CATHARINE

But she is nothing to you! (*Takes up the whip.*)

VAUGHAN

A woman!—who must not be shamed unto death, because of me!

CATHARINE (*enraged as she notes the broken whip: to Khitroff:*)

Achevez! (*Khitroff makes to go behind screen.*)

Vaughan grips him, and in the struggle the screen is toppled over. The French window stands wide-open. On a chair are the Princess Dashkoff's gown and lingerie. From the Nevski Prospekt comes the varied jingle of sleigh bells)

KHITROFF

Gone! Your Majesty!

CATHARINE

Where? How?

KHITROFF (*indicating open window*)

Jump!

CATHARINE

Good! She freeze.—Naked!

VAUGHAN

No! She took my great-coat.—

KHITROFF (*at window*)

See!

CATHARINE (*at window*)

Some one run—through the snow!

VAUGHAN

One of the guards!

CATHARINE

A woman! The hair flies! Tirez!—Khitroff! (*Khitroff draws pistol; aims*) Queeck!

VAUGHAN (*protesting*)

In the dark—others may be struck—!

CATHARINE (*in hysteria of rage*)

Tuez! Tuez!

VAUGHAN (*warningly*)

Your Majesty!—Have a care!—Remember—"Big Lizzie"! She once had a woman killed, and never after dared sleep alone!

CATHARINE

That does not frighten us!—Shoot, Khitroff! (*Khitroff aims pistol*)

VAUGHAN

Captain!—A woman! (*With the crook of his umbrella pulls back Khitroff's arm; the pistol falls from his hand*)

CATHARINE (*picks up the pistol*)

Bah! (*Fires twice; peers out*) All right! She fall!—No! I miss. Got-damn!—The dogs—Khitroff!—(*to Vaughan*) They tear her to pieces. (*Catharine pulls a bell-cord, and deep-toned gongs ring through the corridors. Khitroff rushes to exit left; Vaughan bars his way, with sword which he draws from the umbrella-stick.*)

VAUGHAN

No! (*Khitroff re-crosses to go by window.*)

CATHARINE

Bring her!

KHITROFF (*at window*)

No see!—Yes—(*points*)—l'Ambassade Anglaise!—
Elle a entree!

VAUGHAN

Thank God!

CATHARINE

Drag her out! (*Khitroff exits*) Dead or alive!

VAUGHAN

Your Majesty!—An English subject?

CATHARINE (*deriding*)

Princess Dashkoff?

VAUGHAN

Now Lady Ribblesdale!

CATHARINE (*beside herself*)

Menteur!—Tricheur!—Fourbe! (*Makes to strike him. Vaughan seizes her hand and kisses it*)

VAUGHAN

I shouldn't say that, Your Majesty—not in this instance. Last night—at the Embassy—I made her wife.

CATHARINE (*portentously*)

To-night she be your widow! (*Calls*) Vlas! Vlas! (*Goes to door, right. An angry voice heard off, right, in colloquy with Vlas.*)

THE VOICE

Now, I tell you—and no damned nonsense!—I demand him *now* or hell to pay!

CATHARINE (*with humor*)

Ingleesh Ambassador!

VLAS (*at door*)

Sir Charles Williams!

CATHARINE

What he—demand?

VLAS

Mi-lor' Ribblesdale. (*A pause during which Catharine glares at Vaughan*)

VAUGHAN (*bowing deeply*)

With Your Majesty's leave? (*makes to go, but Vlas bars his way and looks to Catharine for orders*)

CATHARINE (*with gesture of dismissal*)

All right! (*Vaughan exits, followed by Vlas.*)
(*Catharine dazed by this, her first experience of a man's slight—injuria spretae formae—flashes with swiftly changing emotions:—bewilderment, rage, pique, consternation, grief. She turns to the mantel-*

mirror, as if for explanation of the catastrophe. Peers into the glass with anxious scrutiny; smooths her brow, temples, the outer corner of her mouth, her neck, in search of tell-tale lines. Then from a tiny rouge-box, set like a jewel in her bracelet, she "touches-up" cheeks, lips, and pencils eye-brows; takes up a hand-mirror; surveys herself with evident content, humming a gay tune. Rings. Khitroff enters. He brings a coat of silver-fox which he starts to put on Catharine.)

CATHARINE (*declining*)

No.

KHITROFF (*with assurance*)

Yes!

CATHARINE

But—why? I have not cold.

KHITROFF

Your Majesty go to Tsarkoi-Salo.

CATHARINE (*after a slight pause, during which she surveys Khitroff approvingly*)

All right! (*Gets into coat and puts on gloves;—fumbles with thumb of glove.*) Bah! thees ring prevent! (*Extends hand to Khitroff, who kisses it rapturously, and then the other hand; squeezes both till Catharine winces in pain*) Khitroff—you hurt!

KHITROFF (*kissing her hand frantically*)

No! No! No! The ring hurt!—(*Pulls the ring roughly from Catharine's thumb, throws it on table. He perches on corner of table, with impudent assurance.*) (*Catharine takes up ring and starts to put it on Khitroff's little finger*)

KHITROFF (*drawing away*)

No!

CATHARINE (*lightly*)

Till to-morrow. (*Curtain begins to descend very slowly, almost imperceptibly*)

KHITROFF

No!

CATHARINE (*with growing insistence*)

One year! (*Khitroff shakes head "no"*) Two!
(*Same business*) Five! (*offers ring.*)

KHITROFF (*with finality*)

No! (*Makes to go*)

CATHARINE (*restraining him*)

Long as *you* live!

KHITROFF (*with knowing smile*)

Like Lanskoi? Zavadovski? Zoritch?—Yermoloff?
They not live long! (*Shakes head "no" and makes as if to leave her*)

CATHARINE

Long as *I* live! (*Thrusts ring at him*)

KHITROFF

Swear! (*indicates the ikon, which she touches to her lips*) All right! (*Lets her put ring on his little finger*)

CATHARINE (*tensely*)

Thou lov-est?

KHITROFF (*fiercely*)

Yes!

CATHARINE

Swear, Khitroff! (*Khitroff swears in Russian*)
Ingleesh! Swear, Ingleesh!

KHITROFF (*fervently*)

Got-damn!

CATHARINE

More! (*Holds up hand in gesture of oath*)

KHITROFF (*assenting*)

At Tsarkoi Salo!—Come! (*Takes her by the arm and turns to exit, quickly as—*)

CURTAIN

THE REAL PEOPLE

A SAWDUST TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MAM'SELLE TONI A Bare-back Rider

FEATHERS The Clown

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS, Proprietor and Ring-master of
"Saunders' Circus."

THE CALL-BOY

THE REAL PEOPLE

THE SCENE

A dressing-room in a small tent that opens on the main tent of a travelling circus. At right and left of proscenium, a placard—as in a vaudeville-theatre—reads:

“F E A T H E R S,”

Caruso of Clowns

and

Napoleon of Animal Trainers.

At rise of curtain—and a few seconds before—one hears, off, and rather faint, the characteristic hand-organ of the side-shows; and the barkers' cries: “Lemonade—Ice Cold Lemonade.” “Peanuts—Hot—Roasted Peanuts”—“Don't fail to see the Fat Lady.” “This way, Ladies and Gentlemen—” etc., etc. Above these noises—which soften as curtain ascends, is heard the clown's voice, in a typical song.

At rise of curtain Mademoiselle Toni, a bareback rider, in the usual tulle skirts and pink fleshings, is practising her knife “stunt”; throws the blades at a target at opposite side of stage, while she bobs on a spring-board as if on a moving horse.

CALL-BOY'S VOICE (*at right*)

Mam'selle Toni!

TONI

Yes!

CALL-BOY'S VOICE

Note for you. (*Puts note through tent flap*)

TONI (*taking note*)

Thanks!—(*Looks at envelope. Starts to open it; changes her mind as Feathers' voice draws near*)

No answer. (*Hands note through flap*)

CALL-BOY (*insisting*)

It's from Box A.

TONI

Take it back! (*Feathers, in grotesque costume and "make-up," enters from show tent, half turned from audience. He is singing last line or two of a rollicking clown's song:*)

FEATHERS

"And so you see,
I dare not be
As funny as I can!"

(*From the show tent one hears applause and laughter. As Feathers turns front his expression changes, suddenly, from gayety to mingled rage and anxiety*)
He's here again—in Box A. (*Points off*)

TONI (*evasively*)

He must like the show!

FEATHERS (*ruefully*)

'Tisn't the show he comes for!

TONI (*cajolingly*)

Now, now, Feathers—don't be silly!—Or we'll scrap!
(*Adjusts his big bow.*)

FEATHERS

You'll not dine with him?

TONI

Has he asked me?

FEATHERS

I saw the call-boy bring a note.

TONI

I didn't read it!

FEATHERS (*reproachfully*)

And wasn't going to tell me 'bout it!

TONI

You'd only "fuss up"! And your animals would feel it. They did last night. Moment you saw "Diamond Joe," in front—you lost your control—and one of 'em *flew* at you!

FEATHERS

That silly beast, Sultana!—But she only meant to warn me. (*With growing somberness*) They know when trouble's brewing—quicker than we do.

TONI (*to cheer him up*)

Now, look at you! (*Holds a hand mirror before him*) Face as long as a Chinaman's funeral—and they've paid out there to laugh their heads off.

FEATHERS (*bucking up*)

So they shall!—And split their sides—(tragically) though my heart breaks. (*Makes to exit*)

TONI (*intervening*)

You frighten me! What is it?

FEATHERS

I can't tell you!

TONI

You must!

FEATHERS

I don't know—'cept for talk 'mong the people, 'bout the Boss and his friend—some devil's game they're up to—with this supper party.—Don't go, Toni.

TONI

'Course not—if you feel that way!—But what'll I say to the Boss?

FEATHERS

That you won't go!

TONI

He'll make me!

FEATHERS

How?

TONI (*hopelessly*)Ah! (*Turns away*)FEATHERS (*with quiet vehemence*)

Promise you won't go—and I promise he won't make you!

TONI (*with spirit*)

Now, you'll not quarrel over me—and lose your job.

FEATHERS

They can take my job, but they shan't take you!
(*Picks up one of the juggling knives*)

TONI (*takes it from him*)

Why'd you stop that knife, last night?

FEATHERS

It was goin' straight to Box A!

TONI (*throws the knife*)

Straight as—that!—And you *jumped* for it!

FEATHERS

Good God!—you didn't mean—?

TONI (*derisively*)

No!—It was an “accident”!—It's happened before—in other shows. Can happen again—to-night!—And we'd been rid of the beast. (*A gong rings in the main-tent*) (*Saunders enters from main-tent. He is in sputtering rage*)

SAUNDERS (*to Feathers*)

Why'd you leave the ring before the gong?—Cut half your song?

FEATHERS (*confused*)

I—I—

SAUNDERS

Get out there—where you b'long! (*Lashes at him*) (*Toni moves to intervene.*)

FEATHERS (*seizes the whip*)

You're gettin' careless with that whip, Captain—'specially when she's ridin'!—Every time, I notice, you land on her—

TONI (*quickly, in alarm*)

But he don't mean to!

SAUNDERS (*mockingly*)

Oh, no! Of course not!

FEATHERS

Then quit it!—It worries me.

SAUNDERS (*with burst of laughter*)

Why, Feathers, you're actually funny! You make me laugh—(*bitingly*) and that's more than you've done with the Reub's lately—I began to wonder

where you got your reputation! (*Laughing:*) Been holdin' out on me, eh? Well, go to it, now—and (*Imitating Feathers' song:*)

“Let 'em see
You dare to be
As funny as you can!”

FEATHERS

I can't be funny, Saunders, while you're so gay with that lash. It worries me.

SAUNDERS (*with elaborate cajolery*)

Well, we can't have you worried, Feathers! A worried clown ain't worth his feed, in my show. (*Retakes the whip*) So I'll quit it.

FEATHERS (*portentously*)

Good idea! (*Makes to exit*)

SAUNDERS

And—you'll quit too!—After the show. (*Feathers exits*) Why didn't you answer my friend's note?

TONI

I did.

SAUNDERS

You sent it back unopened. (*Shows note*)

TONI (*nodding* “Yes”)

That was my answer!

SAUNDERS (*lashes her*)

There's mine!

TONI (*winces and draws away*)

You've no right to do that!

SAUNDERS (*following up*)

Since when—no right to make my cattle behave?

TONI (*rubbing the hurt*)

That's no way.

SAUNDERS

It's the way in Saunders' Circus—

TONI

Well, it isn't being done, now-a-days.

SAUNDERS

That's how I made you! What was you when I took you? You forget that?

TONI

Oh, no! You've told me too often;—a frowsy-haired, spindle-shanked ragamuffin, street-dancin' with a gyp-show.

SAUNDERS

And when you didn't earn enough—beat black-and-blue by your Romany dad.

TONI (*nodding "Yes"*)

But he was my *dad*.

SAUNDERS

Till the police got busy! Then he sold you to me, for a calico pony and a Persian goat. That's how you started.

TONI

Well, I guess you was no Barnum-Bailey when you started.

SAUNDERS (*threatens to choke her*)

If you weren't going out to dinner—I'd—

TONI

Don't let that stop you—'cause I'm not going!—I promised Feathers. (*Draws away*)

SAUNDERS (*explosively*)

"Feathers"? (*Follows her up*) See here—you in love with him?

TONI (*evasively*)

We're good pals.

SAUNDERS (*laughing derisively*)

In love with a chalk-face!

TONI (*indicating applause in show-tent*)

He's the whole show—with his trained animals.

SAUNDERS (*some geese are led by at back*)

There they go!—his "trained animals"! A pair of geese!—*I* train lions.

TONI

Any fool can train lions,—'cause lions have sense.—
But it takes a great man to train a goose.

SAUNDERS

Well, he's trained you, sure enough.

TONI (*assenting*)

With kindness—affection—things I've never had from you, Mr. Saunders!—From the time I was a kid, in your circus I've known only the whip-and-tongue-lash. (*Cries softly*)

SAUNDERS

You any worse for it?

TONI

You are!—Much worse!—When you strike me you hurt only my body. But with every blow you hurt your own soul, and manhood—until you've made yourself so like the cruel, wild beasts in the cages that they feel you're one of their own kind and no longer fear you. That's why you quit taming "big cats."

SAUNDERS (*strikes her on mouth with back of hand*)

Stow that Billingsgate!—You know it don't go in Saunders' Circus. You got to be ladies and gents—in the ring and out. (*She cries softly*) Don't try to whimper out of it! (*Cracks whip at her*) Answer that! (*Opens the note and hands it to her.*)

TONI (*after glance at note, tosses it aside*) ("No")
Not to-night! I ain't hungry—

SAUNDERS

Is that all?

TONI

No! I hate him—hate his grin—every time I ride past his box. It rattles me—and my horse, too! Couldn't dance a step last night!—And my knife stunt—you saw what happened—only for Feathers! Your friend better sit where I can't see him.—There might be an accident, some night!

SAUNDERS

Your last chance, to-night!

TONI (*overjoyed*)

I'm to quit?

SAUNDERS (*with mock pathos*)

We all quit—to-night.—I've been runnin' the show on borrowed money, since we took to the road.—You know what we've been up against—rain every day 'cept Sundays. No circus ever struck such weather—since Noah's time! Diamond Joe took a likin' to your act—an' kept the show goin'—just so he could see you ride—

TONI (*regretfully*)

O, was that it?

SAUNDERS (*re-assuringly*)

What you think it was—you bone-rack?

TONI

I thought,—maybe—

SAUNDERS

And for that, you'd let the sheriff get us—and all these poor devils out of work?—Fine pal, you are!

TONI

Oh, of course, if you put it that way! (*She sits at dressing-table; starts to write—puts down pen.*)
You just *tell* him—I'll eat with him.

SAUNDERS

Do it like a lady! (*Puts pen in her hand—dictates:*)
“Dear Joe”——

TONI (*as she writes*)

“Dear Sir—Yours received—All right—I'll be there—Toni—Saunders—” (*Turns the letter-page and continues writing;—makes to put note in envelope.*)

SAUNDERS

Let's see. (*Takes letter, reads first part silently, then turns page, as she did; reads:*) “I'll bring my friend Feathers to the party.” (*Extends the letter*)
Tear that off!

TONI (*refusing the letter*)

No.

SAUNDERS

I'll save you the trouble. (*Tears off the page*)

TONI

Then I'll not send it.

SAUNDERS

I'll save you *that* trouble, too. (*Puts sheet in envelope, makes to exit*)

TONI (*approaches him, quickly*)

What you going to do?

SAUNDERS

Give it to Joe.

TONI (*pleadingly*)

Please don't! 'cause I shan't dine with him alone!

SAUNDERS

I'll be there!

TONI

Then why not Feathers?

SAUNDERS

He's too worried for—a wedding-party.

TONI

Whose?

SAUNDERS

Yours—in Joe's room.

TONI (*bewildered*)

What you up to?

SAUNDERS

You're going to marry him to-night.

TONI (*in panic*)

No! (*Looks about for some way to escape*)

SAUNDERS (*indicating note*)

You fixed it, yourself!

TONI

I won't go! (*Grabs letter from Saunders; starts to tear it to pieces*)

SAUNDERS (*as he grabs her by the throat*)

You little cat! Give it! (*Chokes her till she drops note. For a while she stares at him with ominous calm. Puts her hand to throat, as if in pain, swallows hard*)

TONI (*coldly, indicating throat*)

Does it leave a mark, Mr. Saunders?

SAUNDERS (*turning away*)

Ask Feathers.—He's off in a minute.

TONI (*matter-of-fact tone*)

He'll kill you! (*Goes to mirror so as better to see the marks*)

SAUNDERS (*derisively*)

"Kill me"?

TONI (*coldly*)

I believe he'd kill you if he saw this. (*Covers the mark with her hand*)

SAUNDERS

Well, to make sure,—show him *that*. (*Lashes her 'cross shoulders*)

TONI (*takes up a juggling-knife from dressing-table*)

Yes—but first I'll show him—*that*! (*Like a flash she turns and stabs him*) (*Saunders gasps, totters back to the tent-pole, against which he leans unsteadily. Feathers enters from main-tent. He is in rollicking laughter, or else concluding a comic song. After final bow to the circus audience he turns quickly to see Toni leaning, faint, 'gainst the dressing-table; his tone changes suddenly from gayety to panic*)

FEATHERS (*aghast*)

What is it?

TONI (*breathless*)

He—struck—me—

FEATHERS (*makes to attack Saunders*)

By God, then I'll—

TONI (*intervening*)

No! (*Knife falls from her hand*)

FEATHERS (*taking up the knife*)

That's my work, Toni!

TONI (*restraining him*)

I've done it, for you.

SAUNDERS (*gaspingly*)

And you've done for me—but—you'll pay for it!

TONI (*smiling; joyous, ecstatic*)

I mean to!—I want to hang for it—so Feathers shouldn't! (*Throws her arms about him, gingerly. Feathers kisses her violently*)

Placard, at right and left of proscenium, is replaced by card reading:

M L L E. T O N I

and

HER DANCING HORSE, TIPTOE.

CALL-BOY (*heard off, in sing-song*)

Mam'selle Toni—Mam'selle Toni! (*Feathers still kissing her*)

SAUNDERS (*angrily*)

Your turn!

CALL-BOY (*at entrance*)

Props, mam'selle! (*Feathers starts to hand two or three tissue-covered hoops through the flap*)

TONI (*intervenes quickly*) (*To Call-Boy*) Right-O! (*To Feathers*) They mustn't see you here. (*Hands the hoops to the Call-Boy*)

SAUNDERS (*gasps faintly, in an effort to call help*)

Boy! Boy! (*Feathers silences him by putting hand over mouth*)

CALL-BOY'S VOICE

Knives, Mam'selle.

TONI

O, yes—knives. (*Saunders gestures "No"*) I—I—
want 'em—to-night (*Hands them to Call-Boy*)

A VOICE, OFF (*announcing through megaphone*)

Nex' number on the program: "Mam'selle Toni, and
her famous dancing horse, Tiptoe." (MUSIC: "*Fox
Trot Medley.*")

CALL-BOY'S VOICE

Your music cue,—Mam'selle.

TONI

Right-O! (*Half-fainting, staggers toward exit*)

FEATHERS (*arm about her*)

You can't ride—you can't—(*All the time kissing
her*)

SAUNDERS (*with a gesture of command makes to in-
tervene. To Toni:*)

Go on! Your duty to the public! (*Totters weakly
toward exit*)

TONI (*insisting to Feathers who restrains her*)

Yes—let me go—let me—

FEATHERS

You'd fall—hurt yourself!—Wait! (*Pushes Saun-
ders back.*) (*Feathers shows himself at entrance to
main-tent. He is greeted with applause and shouts
of "Feathers!" "Bravo!" He shakes his head "No,"
and gestures silence. Calls off*) Stop the music!
There's been an accident (*Music ceases*) (*To audi-*

ence:) Ladies and gentlemen—Mam'selle Toni and her famous dancing horse will not appear to-night!—An accident!—You'll get your money back at the ticket-wagon. (*Saunders topples to the ground*) The performance is over! (*Collapses in tears*) (*Turns to Toni*) Now for Diamond Joe! (*Makes to exit: halts*) Here he comes! (*Draws pistol: cocks it as he exits*)

TONI (*joyously*)

Good! Kill him! (*Drops into a chair, at dressing-table; buries head in arms. Enter back, or left, the Call-Boy—a negro, very black. He comes on briskly, singing Feathers' verses: "So you see, I dare not be," etc. He carries on upraised hand a tray on which are several covered dishes, glass of celery, plates, and conspicuous, a bridal bouquet. He stumbles on a tent-peg, and the dishes fly noisily in all directions. On the noise Feathers re-enters. Saunders jumps to his feet. Note: From this point on, to the conclusion of Act, the players address one another by their real names.*)

FEATHERS (*angrily*)

What's that?

CALL-BOY (*frightened. Puts on table, from his pockets, several tissue-covered sandwiches, apples, etc.*)

Accident! There's been an accident! (*Exits quickly*)

SAUNDERS (*taking up the bridal bouquet*)

Lunch—I had sent in.

FEATHERS (*angrily*)

You wouldn't eat *now*?

SAUNDERS (*eyeing wreck on floor*)

—We're not in your scene with Diamond Joe—
and my wife's rather faint—(*Hands her box of
chocolates*)

FEATHERS (*staggered*)

Your wife?—not really?

TONI (*timidly*)

We're married. (*Shows the bridal bouquet*)

FEATHERS

When I engaged you, you said you were only—
engaged.

SAUNDERS

Her parents opposed our engagement—

TONI

Think I'm too young—

SAUNDERS

So we got married, this morning.

FEATHERS

I knew something was wrong—from your acting.

SAUNDERS

Not hers!

FEATHERS

O, I could do something with her!—But *you!* (*Ges-
ture of hopelessness*)

TONI (*flaring*)

He's splendid!

FEATHERS

Not for vaudeville. (*Takes a sandwich*)

SAUNDERS (*piqued*)

What's the matter with me?—Mr. . . . (*Name of
actor. Feathers can't answer with his mouthful of
food. Louder:)* What's wrong with me?

FEATHERS (*after swallowing hard*)

You ain't brutal enough!

TONI (*staggered*)

Not "brutal enough!"

FEATHERS

Not for vaudeville! (*Indicating audience*) You want those people out there to sympathize with you—weep over you!—Show 'em you're scared of Saunders—(*His fist under her nose*) that he's got you cowed!

TONI

So he has!—Cowed—bullied, buffaloed—and all the rest of the male brutes!

FEATHERS

You didn't show it! And you got to show it! (*To audience*) Don't you got to show you? (*To Saunders, very gently and softly*) Growl and bark at her! (*Takes another sandwich*) The way you purred, they'd know she's your wife!

TONI (*under her breath*)

Scarcely!

FEATHERS

And where's the blood from the stab? (*Jabs Saunders' shirt bosom*)

SAUNDERS (*disconcerted*)

I—I—thought the audience would *imagine*—

FEATHERS (*impatient*)

Say!—Whenever a vaudeville audience has to *imagine* things—you'll have to *imagine* the audience.—Show 'em!—(*Takes up a can of red paint and makes to mark the "stab" on Saunders*)

TONI (*intervening, in alarm*)

Please, Mr. . . . (*Blank*)—I'm to blame—I asked my husband not to—It made me sort o'—(*Hand on stomach*) faint—and I thought we could omit the—(*half-whisper*) blood—at least while we're playing New York.

FEATHERS (*confidential, but intense*)

When you're playing New York—New Haven—New Zealand—or Newark—you're playing "in Missouri"!—And you got to show 'em—Don't you never read the critics?—"Cut out the red paint"! Why, that's the best thing I wrote!

TONI

Yes, and it's very powerful; but some ladies can't stand it—makes them deathly ill—

FEATHERS

That's what I figger on!—That's my punch!—(*Indicating audience*) They're not your Fifth Avenue lah-de-dahs—with lemon-meringues for brains: and none o' your blazay Broadway first-nighters, with porter-house steaks for hearts! They're the real people out there: the worried, tired business-man—w'ot the critics write about;—the poor, over-worked house-wife, with a raft o' kids at home to look after.—They come here for their romance—and to forget the dull grind of business and house-work.—And you'll see 'em comin'—day after day—the same people—every matinée—and again at night—upstairs. But they want real dray-ma! not fak-ing—(*To Toni*) like that back-fall of his! (*To Saunders, who is rubbing back of his head*) You just flopped! (*Imitates, limply*)

TONI

Good Lord! I heard his poor head bump!

FEATHERS (*indicates audience*)

But *they* got to hear it bump! (*To Saunders*) They'll want to hear it *crack*—if you treat her right—way I'm tellin' you. (*Indicating audience*) Those people got *hearts*—witals! (*To Toni*) You'll get an *encore* when you kill him!—'cause that's *life*! I've saw the biggest stars leave 'em cold—with *bunk*: Mrs. Fiske with that Ibsen sex stuff—Arnold Daly and his Shaw piffle—Richard Bennett with Mr. Brioux's "Damaged Spine" and locomotor-ataxia! Why, they sat out there like *they* had it—or was doped!—(*Changes to cheery tone*) And five minutes later, an animal act!—and they crying their eyes out over a dog in a night-cap singing a sick pup to sleep. (*Plaintively, to Saunders*) Now, why can't you do it?

SAUNDERS (*rather peeved, offers "rôle"*)

You play my part!

FEATHERS

Good idea!

TONI (*offering her rôle*)

Here's another—play *mine*!

SAUNDERS (*in alarm*)

No, no!—We'll try the scene again, dear—more "brutal"?

FEATHERS

Yes, 'specially with that whip! (*Cracks the whip*)

TONI (*rubbing the lash marks*)

Perhaps you'd like it better if he used a club on me—

(*Through tears of weariness*) or a tent-stake. (*Kicks one at him*)

FEATHERS

Good idea. (*Picks up the stake. Stamps toward Toni, fiercely:*) Fly at her! Roar!—Beat her down! Drive her back! Like that—(*Stamps, and raises stake at Toni*)—and that—and that! (*Toni doesn't stir; quite unmoved, goes on munching chocolates. Feathers triumphant:*) There! Paralyzed with fear! Your wife's got a heart!

TONI (*in sudden rage and rather hysteric; she beats him down with each sentence:*)

You haven't! Or if you have, it's sawdust—not flesh-and-blood! Or you wouldn't always find fault with my husband—nag him—insult him—eat his lunch—and ask him to crack his skull.—Well, he shan't do it! And if you can't “show” an audience without that sort of thing, crack your own skull! And when you kiss me, you'll please kiss me on the cheek!

FEATHERS (*jumping in*)

“Cheek”?

TONI (*ditto*)

Yes, and *once*—only once!

SAUNDERS (*ditto*)

Quite enough!

FEATHERS (*ditto*)

Not for the “tired business man.”

TONI (*quite beside herself*)

If you think you can kiss me all over the place—day I'm married—you try it! Just you try it! And I'll show the audience, how cowed I am—and bullied

—and paralyzed.—And I'll show you, Mr. . . .
(*Blank*)—that you're rehearsing a couple of artists
—not a pair of geese! (*Bursts out crying*)

FEATHERS (*beaming triumphantly. To audience*)
See the difference?—when she's really frightened?
(*To Toni*) Try it with him! And forget he's your
husband.

TONI (*angrily, through her tears*)
Not for vaudeville. (*Begins to put on street clothes*)

SAUNDERS
There! The poor girl's all un-nerved—fagged out.
No more now. We're going out to eat.

FEATHERS (*with elaborate resignation, sandwich in one
hand, celery in the other.*)
Go as far as you like!

SAUNDERS
Won't you join us? (*Takes up hat and coat*)

TONI
I'm sure you must be starved!

FEATHERS (*protesting through a mouthful*)
I'll peck at this. (*Takes up apple from floor*) I
can't eat during rehearsals.

TONI (*fetches box of chocolates from 'dressing-table,
offers them*)

FEATHERS (*looking at her*)
Chocolates?

TONI (*nodding "Yes"*)
They'll keep you going till you *can* eat.

FEATHERS
Good idea! (*Empties all the chocolates into his cap
and returns her the box*)

TONI (*taking the hint*)

Are we to come back—after lunch?

FEATHERS (*gestures "No"*)

Not if you're still married!

TONI

What!

FEATHERS

'Stead of lunch—get a divorce!

TONI AND SAUNDERS

Not for vaudeville. (*They exit quickly. The Call-Boy enters from back: gathers up the lunch dishes, all the while laughing vociferously:*)

FEATHERS

What you laughing at?

CALL-BOY (*through guffaws*)

You-ah play, boss. Ah-ve been listenin'—an' ah mos' bus' mah sides laughin'—It shuah am too funny!

FEATHERS (*in temper*)

"Too funny?" You—(*Picks up vase to throw*)

CALL-BOY (*quickly*) (*stammering*)

N—n—not for vaudeville!

CURTAIN

AREN'T THEY WONDERS?

A HOLIDAY TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

FELIX TORREY

MRS. TORREY

MISS KAYE

TOM FARREN

AREN'T THEY WONDERS?

The scene is the office of Felix Torrey, Architect and Builder. A well-appointed room with furniture of mahogany or antique oak; dark rugs on the parquet-floor; on the walls pictures of famous structures—the Colosseum, Pantheon, Milan Cathedral, etc., and architect's drawings of bridges. A door, at back, opens on the corridor of an office building; door at right leads to Tom Farren's room; door at left to Miss Kaye's. Down stage, right, a window, with hangings, looks down on the street. At rise of curtain, Felix Torrey is seated at desk, center, occupied with architect's blue-prints. He is a man of about forty, of medium height, powerful build; the face, though rather heavy, indicates strong, determined, self-reliant character. His manner and bearing add to that impression; and, altogether, Torrey looks the man quite able to hold his own in life.

TORREY (*calling*)

Farren! (*Looks toward door at right. Louder*)
Tom! (*Rises, touches push-button on wall, crosses to door right, and looks in. Miss Kaye enters, from left. She is a girl of wholesome prettiness; reddish hair, irregular features, peach-and-cream coloring. She is dressed simply, of course; but her*

skirt hangs well, her jacket fits trimly, and her shoes, too. Her appearance suggests "pertness" that her manner and fashion of speech quickly deny)

MISS KAYE

You rang, Mr. Torrey?

TORREY

Yes, Miss Kaye. I want those other bridge-plans. Where's Mr. Farren?

MISS KAYE (*as she fetches them from filing-cabinet*)

He's stepped out for a moment, to the 'phone-booth.

TORREY (*quizzically*)

Why? Aren't *our* 'phones working?

MISS KAYE

It was an outside call, Mr. Torrey. They sent up for him.

TORREY

Yes! (*Slightly annoyed*) But that's the second time in half an hour. I'm afraid our Mr. Farren is getting too popular—with the ladies.

MISS KAYE (*impersonally*)

It's the holiday-season, sir.

TORREY

Yes—that may account for his preoccupations, lately.—Eh?

MISS KAYE

Yes, sir.

TORREY (*looking at blue-print*)

Clever fellow—Farren. Will get on—if he gets hold of the right girl. (*Takes letter from her*)

MISS KAYE

Other way about, sir—the letter! (*She turns it*)

TORREY (*with double meaning*)

Yes—I did have it upside down. (*Miss Kaye crosses to exit left, as Farren enters, back. Farren is a good-looking youth, in the early twenties, cheery, buoyant, but in no degree bumptious. Despite the inherent tragedy of the story, he does not bear himself as if he were consumed by a gnawing sense of sin, nor bending under a burden of secret woe. Which suggestion is added for the guidance of the actor of the rôle.*)

TORREY (*calling*)

Miss Kaye, have them 'phone Mrs. Torrey—and put me on here. (*Miss Kaye exits. Torrey, to Farren, quizzically*) Will you be free, now, for a while?

FARREN (*catching his meaning*)

Well—I—I've a slight cold, Mr. Torrey—and I went out for some—some—aspirin.

TORREY (*dryly*)

Yes, but that's the second dose this morning. You should take that kind of dope in water—not by telephone. It can lead to heart-trouble. (*Goes right on, in same tone*) I want you to compare these blue-prints. I'm taking them to New York. I expect to close that bridge-contract. If I do, there'll be double work here for all of us—and double salary for you.

FARREN

Gee whiz!—That's ripping of you!

TORREY

Then *you* rip off a few 'phone-calls—and part of your dance-programmes, and a few courses out of your two-hour lunches—like yesterday.

FARREN

Yes—that did happen a couple of times lately. But, usually, Mr. Torrey, I'm right here!

TORREY

Indeed you're *not* here—even when you *are*! (*Pats him on the back*) You're away off somewhere—gathering wool on the seashore, or picking peaches in tea-gardens.—Why, I've caught you mooning over the ground-plan of an oil-tank as though it were *her* portrait!—Cut it, boy!—I want to feel that you know this office from A to Z—in case we lose Miss Kaye!

FARREN (*alert*)

Why? Will she be leaving?

TORREY

Why, of course!—You don't suppose that corking girl was meant to stick here?—Get the run of things—so when she goes we won't miss her too much! (*Farren cuts a wry face, which Torrey notes out the corner of his eye.*) (*Miss Kaye re-enters from left; she brings a number of typewritten letter-sheets, and several large filing-envelopes*)

MISS KAYE (*placing letter-sheets before Torrey*)

They're ready to sign. (*Makes to cross to filing-case, right*)

FARREN (*intervening alertly*)

I'll file those, Miss Kaye.

MISS KAYE

Thank you. (*She hands him the envelopes, one by one, which he puts into various drawers of the filing-case. Torrey is signing letters*)

TORREY (*to Miss Kaye*)

Did you get Mrs. Torrey?

MISS KAYE

No, sir.—Mrs. Torrey's lying down, they said—and couldn't answer!

TORREY

Tell 'em *I* want her.

MISS KAYE

I did, but the maid said Mrs. Torrey has a headache—and gave orders not to disturb her.

TORREY

Well, then, leave the message with the maid—to tell Mrs. Torrey—later—that we leave for New York on the four o'clock train—not the five. (*Miss Kaye crosses to exit—when enter Mrs. Torrey. She is approaching thirty in years, but has never left twenty in looks—slight of figure, delicate in feature; coloring that of the Lily-Maid-of-Astolat done in porcelain. She is careless, heartless, soulless, utterly; but none-the-less delightful. She is dressed so well that one would scarcely notice how well; being one of the women who lead the fashions she doesn't follow them. She bursts in, excited, breathless, faint; closes the door with a bang, leans with her back against it, as if barring some one out. Half-whispers her husband's name*) What is it, child? What's happened? (*Leads her to chair—still very faint*)

MRS. TORREY (*gasping*)

Nothing! Wait—I'm so frightened! (*Looks toward door. Torrey makes to go to door. Mrs. Torrey protesting and restraining him*) No, no!—Let him

be!—It's all right—now. (*Holds his hand to her cheek*)

TORREY

Who?—Who was it?

MRS. TORREY

I don't know! Some brute—tried to speak to me!
Followed me—ever since I've been out.

TORREY (*bewildered*)

But they 'phoned just now you were home—lying
down—bad headache.

MRS. TORREY (*for an instant disconcerted*)

Well—I—I—thought a walk would help me—the
crisp, cold air. (*Puts hands over eyes*) Now it's
worse than ever! (*Appears about to faint*)

TORREY (*in alarm*)

Vera, dear!

MISS KAYE (*going to water-cooler*)

Some water—(*Offers glass to Torrey*) Dash this
in her face.

MRS. TORREY (*instantly quite herself*)

Don't! (*Resumes faintness*) Isn't necessary.

MISS KAYE (*looks rather than says*)

I thought so! (*Turns glass to show it is empty*)

TORREY

But you shouldn't have come out—

MRS. TORREY (*plaintively*)

Don't scold me, please! I had to go to Bailey's—
the jewelers, for something.

TORREY

Why didn't you 'phone? They'd have sent it home.

MRS. TORREY

I was afraid they wouldn't—in time—before we left.

And I wanted you to have it to-day—your New Year's present. (*Hands him a small packet, which he places on table*) I wouldn't have come out but for that!—And who'd think he'd dare—on the street—broad daylight—that beast!

TORREY (*distressed*)

You should have jumped into a taxi—or called an officer!

MRS. TORREY

And make a street-scene?—I thought, of course, he'd turn away, but when I got to the building—there he was—at my heels—followed me in—got in the elevator—and off at this floor! (*Torrey starts for the door; she stops him*) No, please, don't have a scene. I couldn't stand it. Call a taxi—send me home.

TORREY

I'll take you! (*Puts on overcoat*)

MRS. TORREY

No!—Don't leave your work—break up your day—(*Glances at Farren*) One of the clerks will do—

MISS KAYE (*jumping in*)

I'll see Mrs. Torrey to the door.

TORREY

No! Thank you.—(*Makes ready to go. To Miss Kaye*) And in case I'm not back to-day—send these prints to New York—special delivery. They must have them at once. And, Farren, you come along—for any further instructions. (*Miss Kaye exits left. Farren opens the door, waits for Torrey and Mrs. Torrey to precede. As Mrs. Torrey is about to step out, she starts back, in a panic*)

MRS. TORREY

There he is—waiting! (*Farren makes to rush out, but Torrey pushes him back*)

TORREY

Stay here—with Mrs. Torrey—till I come back. (*Exits quickly. Farren remains near door, which he holds slightly open. Instantly there is a turmoil in the corridor, loud voices, etc.*) (*Farren opens the door wide—and makes to exit*)

MRS. TORREY (*stopping him*)

No!—Close the door!

FARREN (*still at door*)

Your husband sent him sprawling! (*The turmoil in corridor increases: cries of "Police!" etc.*)

MRS. TORREY

Shut the door!—They'll see me.

FARREN ("No")

They're going now. (*Closes door, comes down*)

MRS. TORREY

Before he comes in—quick! (*She kisses him; he half turns away*) Oh, what a—! (*Tries to kiss him again; he jumps back, motions "caution," and points to door. Mrs. Torrey goes to door, opens it slightly. Re-assuringly*) No one!

FARREN (*at window*)

There's a crowd below—at the door.

MRS. TORREY

Mr. Torrey there?

FARREN (*peering out*)

I don't see him.

MRS. TORREY

Where's he gone?

FARREN (*troubled*)

I don't know—unless—(*Hesitates*)

MRS. TORREY (*alarmed*)

He won't have that fool arrested?

FARREN (*still at window*)

No—but some one may have brought an officer—

MRS. TORREY (*with temper*)

Damn it! If he's dragged me into this!—Of course, Felix would over-do it! (*Torrey re-enters. He is pale from anger, but unflurried. He rubs knuckles of right hand*) Is he gone?

TORREY (*with meaning*)

Quite! (*Touches barked knuckles with kerchief*)

MRS. TORREY

You're hurt, poor dear! (*Looks at his hurt hand and winces*)

TORREY

Nothing.

MRS. TORREY (*annoyed*)

Why d'you *strike* him?

TORREY (*with a quizzical smile*)

What did you want me to do? Invite him to lunch?

MRS. TORREY

No—but to upset me like this!

TORREY

He's the one "upset"!

MRS. TORREY (*uneasy*)

What did he say—before you hit him?

TORREY

Nothing, before—and *less* after. (*To Farren*) Look up the next train to New York—express. (*Farren exits, right*)

MRS. TORREY

Oh, don't let's go to-day! I'm all—(*Gesture of distraction*)

TORREY

You must—and at once!—Before the newspapers learn of this affair—and reporters come bothering.—I don't want your name to figure in this—not for worlds, dear!

MRS. TORREY

Good heavens, no!—Come!

TORREY (*embarrassed*)

I can't go, just yet.—Later, perhaps, but—

MRS. TORREY

Why? What is it? (*Panicky*) He DID say something?

TORREY

No, no—but the man is rather badly hurt. I struck harder than I knew—and he fell against a granite column in the hall—and hurt his head. Just how serious they can't tell till they get him to the hospital. They want me to be here, if anything—*happens*. (*Some one rattles the door-knob, as if trying to enter; then knocks two or three times on the door*)

TORREY (*calling*)

Yes, yes! (*Goes to door; opens slightly; speaks off*) Just a moment more.

MRS. TORREY (*panicky*)

Who is it?

TORREY (*lightly*)

Some one to show me—to the magistrate's.

MRS. TORREY

An officer?

TORREY (*nods "yes"*)

But in plain clothes. No one will notice—and it's just around the corner—the magistrate's office.—And you take the next train.

MRS. TORREY (*in tone of poignant distress*)

Oh, but I can't do that!—Go 'way and leave you here—in all this trouble! I should go mad with anxiety and loneliness!

TORREY

But you'll be with friends. They're expecting us. They've arranged a jolly party for this evening—dinner, theatre, and to dance the New Year in!

MRS. TORREY

Yes, but it's hours till then—*Hours!* And meanwhile I'd have to be alone—and every minute would seem a year!—I couldn't do it! (*Farren re-enters*) And the journey over there—all by myself!—I'd jump off the train!

TORREY

No, no, you needn't go alone. Some one must take you over. (*To Farren*) Farren, I hate to disturb your holiday plans—but you'll have to see Mrs. Torrey to New York. I want her out of town till this little trouble blows over. You'd better take the next train.

FARREN

Yes, sir.—Three o'clock.

MRS. TORREY (*drying her eyes; protesting*)

A nice show I'll make of myself—crying my eyes out—before a car full of people!

TORREY (*rings*)

No one will see you. (*To Miss Kaye, who enters*)

Miss Kaye, 'phone or send to the Pullman office—hold the drawing-room on the three o'clock train for New York. Reserve in name of Mr. Farren. He'll call for it at the station. (*To Farren*) And see Mrs. Torrey has something to read—and cheer her up.—Now, don't worry, dearest.—Soon as they find Judge Latham, or some other, bail will be arranged, and I'll probably be with you before theatre's out.

MRS. TORREY

You will come over, later?

TORREY

Of course, girl! I wouldn't miss this evening with you for anything in the world! Think of it—New Year's eve! and me away from you when those chimes ring out at midnight!—I'd blow up the jail!

MRS. TORREY

Yes, you must! But call me up on long-distance, the moment you find you can come over. Promise you will!—I won't know a minute's peace 'til then. And this young man can wait for the message—at the hotel—so I'm *sure* to get it. You can't trust those 'phone girls, at hotels. (*The knock on door resumes, rather more insistent*)

TORREY (*to Mrs. Torrey*) Good-bye, and don't worry! (*Kisses her. To Farren*) You stay over 'til you hear from me.—If it's too late to come back, the hotel-valet will give you what you need for the night. (*Exits quickly. Farren attends him to the door. then comes down slowly. An ambulance-gong heard from street*)

FARREN (*at window*)

Gee whiz!—Ambulance! (*Distressed*) What luck!

(*Mrs. Torrey, who seemingly has been on the verge of tears, emerges from behind her kerchief with a broad smile of mischief*)

MRS. TORREY

Yes! Better even than I hoped for!

FARREN (*puzzled*)

"Hoped"? (*Mrs. Torrey nods "yes," and laughs lightly*) Good God!—You don't mean you *planned* all this?

MRS. TORREY (*nods more vigorously, and smiles as if pleased with herself*)

Not *all* of it, no! Not that—mess—out there!

FARREN (*utterly at sea*)

And that man *didn't* follow you?

MRS. TORREY

Yes, of course!

FARREN

And flirted with you?

MRS. TORREY (*nods "yes"*)

With a little help. (*Laughs*) He didn't need much! (*Noting that Farren doesn't share her fun*) Now don't look so shocked!—At first I thought, maybe, it was some one I knew—and so, perhaps, I looked at him—and possibly I smiled. I don't know.

FARREN (*peevied*)

Well, you certainly know whether or not you—encouraged him.

MRS. TORREY

I guess he thought so!

FARREN

But—why'd you do it?—What for?

MRS. TORREY

For *you*, silly! And for me!—so I could get out of going to New York with Felix—and maybe see you this evening.

FARREN (*embarrassed*)

But you knew I'd an engagement—this evening.

MRS. TORREY (*slightly*)

With one of the typewriters?

FARREN

With Miss Kaye. It was arranged days ago.

MRS. TORREY

So was my trip to New York—with Mr. Torrey.—But we never dreamed, you and I, this could happen—so wonderfully! I lay awake half the night trying to think how I could manage—and woke up with nothing better than a headache. I knew he'd talk me out of *that*, so I thought I'd best run down and lunch with him and—faint at table!

FARREN (*vacantly*)

You're a wonder!

MRS. TORREY

Yes, I do faint rather well!—But just after I 'phoned you, the *first* time, that beast turned up—stood at the booth as I came out, as though he'd been listening. That made me uneasy—so I 'phoned you again, *not* to meet me.—I thought sure he was tracking me.

FARREN (*not understanding*)

“Tracking”——?

MRS. TORREY (*nods “yes”*)

Detective—I thought—watching me.

FARREN

But why?—who would——? He's never seen you *speak* to me—your husband.

MRS. TORREY

Not he! Some one else. A friend of Felix. He's mad about me—and jealous of you. He's seen us together once or twice at that road-house, in the park. And he's acting like a fool.

FARREN

Who is he?—That riding-master you spoke of?

MRS. TORREY (*with a wince of disgust*) ("No")

That was in Palm Beach—a year ago.

FARREN

Not that cad of a dancer, from the hotel cabaret?

MRS. TORREY

No! He's left town.

FARREN (*insistent*)

Who is it, then?

MRS. TORREY (*flaring*)

None of your business!

FARREN (*abashed*)

Of course not! (*Pulling himself together*) I beg your pardon, Mrs. Torrey.

MRS. TORREY (*pettingly*)

Now you're a dear boy, again! But if you're going to be jealous—and ask questions, like all the others—you'll spoil it all! You men are wonders! Always so suspicious!—If you weren't the one I *really* cared for, would I ever have *thought* of all this?—Play street-tag with a stranger, let him follow me almost to the door—and frighten me half to death—so I could faint decently?—And all just to see you for

maybe an hour this evening? Only love can find a way like that!—And once, there, I nearly lost my nerve.

FARREN (*dryly*)

I hadn't noticed it.

MRS. TORREY

But I *did*—when that frump of a typewriter started to drench me—for a moment I lost my nerve, and you, poor dear, lost your New Year's gift.—Here it is (*takes gold cigarette-case from the box that she had given Torrey*) with your monogram—"T. F." That's what I came out for—and 'phoned you to meet me—to give it to you.—And now Felix will carry it! It's all right, though. He'll take "T. F." for his initials, "F. T." Well, I'll think of you whenever I see him use it—and you, I suppose, will have a good laugh.

FARREN (*distressed*)

Don't! Please don't!—He's such a splendid chap!

MRS. TORREY

Don't take it so tragic, Tomkins!

FARREN

Well, isn't it rather tragic—for him?

MRS. TORREY (*piqued*)

If you feel that way, we'll stop right where we are!

FARREN (*eagerly*)

It isn't too late!

MRS. TORREY

That's for me to say, isn't it? It is the woman's privilege, I believe, to draw back. Yesterday, in the park, when I merely hinted such a thing—you

said you'd die—(*imitating*) for me—"of a broken heart."

FARREN

Yes—but I don't like the idea of this other chap dying—of a broken head.—Somehow, hang it!—that takes it out of a fellow.

MRS. TORREY

Of course, if you're afraid some day Felix may send *you* sprawling——

FARREN (*breaking in*)

I'm not thinking of myself, nor him, nor anything but you—the risk you're running—the danger you're in—now and all your future—just for a caprice—a moment's fancy—that you'll forget in a month.

MRS. TORREY (*chaffingly*)

We'll talk about that in New York.

FARREN

Do you think, after what's happened, I ought to go?

MRS. TORREY (*with mock gravity*)

No!—But we'll talk it over on the train, Tomkins!
(*Farren shows indecision—reluctance*)

MRS. TORREY (*with temper*)

Oh, maybe you'd prefer to stay here, with Miss Kaye?

FARREN (*troubled*)

No—I was only wondering—well, I think she knows you 'phoned me to-day.

MRS. TORREY

What of it? She heard Mr. Torrey tell you—And I won't go without you.—Think of it! New Year's Eve! Music and dancing, at every turn.—Every-

body gay, and having a good time, with some one they care for.—And me over there alone!

FARREN

But you'll be with friends!

MRS. TORREY

Who wants to be with *friends* at such a time?—And a fine lot of stupid old fluffs—trying to be jolly because they're a year older! (*Nervously*) Why, when those chimes ring out at midnight I'd go mad—want to kick over the table and smash things!—You'll simply have to come along—to save the china!!

FARREN (*dissuadingly*)

Yes—but Mr. Torrey doesn't mean—— I'll not be in the party.

MRS. TORREY

Neither will I, stupid!—I'll have a killing headache, from worry, all the way over.—It's beginning now.—And if they drag me off to dinner, I'll faint before the salad.—Now come along, Tomkins. (*Miss Kaye enters from left, in season to hear the "Tomkins." Crosses to Torrey's desk, from which she takes a bank-checke*)

MISS KAYE (*to Farren*)

Mr. Torrey's just 'phoned for the pay-roll cheque; he forgot to sign it. Will you take it to him, at the magistrate's office?

MRS. TORREY

Is there time?

FARREN (*looking at watch*)

Ample—it's only a few steps. (*Makes to exit*)

MISS KAYE

And will you please fetch the money from the bank?
(*Farren exits*) Feeling better, Mrs. Torrey?

MRS. TORREY

Much.

MISS KAYE

Well enough to travel alone?

MRS. TORREY

I shouldn't care to risk it.—Mr. Torrey's clerk will see me over.

MISS KAYE

Yes, I know; but I was hoping if you've quite recovered from the shock, you might manage without Mr. Farren.

MRS. TORREY

You need him here? (*Indicates the office*)

MISS KAYE

Very much—in case anything happens—and Mr. Torrey is detained elsewhere.

MRS. TORREY (*as if it didn't matter*)

You should have told my husband, and he'd sent one of the other clerks.

MISS KAYE

You won't mind, then, if I arrange for some one else, 'stead of Mr. Farren?

MRS. TORREY

Not in the least! (*Miss Kaye makes to exit*) But I do mind your interfering with my husband's orders to this Mister—er—what-you-call-him?

MISS KAYE

"Tomkins?" (*Mrs. Torrey, startled, appears about to faint*) (*With seeming anxiety*) Don't faint,

please, Mrs. Torrey! He'll be back in a few minutes, and I've a lot to say.

MRS. TORREY

It couldn't possibly interest me. (*Seizes her muff from desk, and makes to go impetuously*)

MISS KAYE (*blocking the way*)

You can't go now, Mrs. Torrey! Two reporters are waiting (*nods toward hall*) for an interview and snap-shot.

MRS. TORREY

Then get back to your work—where you belong! Before you regret your impudence.

MISS KAYE (*with feeling*)

I regret it now.—I'd be horribly ashamed if I didn't regret it all my life. Ten minutes ago I wouldn't have been capable of such brazen impudence, and I won't be again ten minutes from now. So I must tell you quick:—you're going to New York *without* Mr. "Tomkins"!

MRS. TORREY (*after a slight pause*)

When I tell Mr. Torrey this—he won't believe me.

MISS KAYE

Oh, yes! He'll believe anything you tell him.—Or he'd never sent that poor fool to the hospital!

MRS. TORREY (*flaring*)

I suppose the brute didn't follow me?

MISS KAYE

Oh, I guess he followed you, all right! What man wouldn't, once he got your eye, and a sniff of your violet and lilac and sachet stuff flirted at him?—Of course he'll follow you. It's the nature of the brute, even a nice, clean young brute, like this chap here

was till you—— I don't know what you've done to him—but—why—after one of your 'phone-calls he can't look me in the face!

MRS. TORREY

Have you any claim on him? You going to marry him?

MISS KAYE

Yes.

MRS. TORREY

I didn't know that.

MISS KAYE

Neither does he! But he'll know it—when he comes out of the ether.

MRS. TORREY (*puzzled*)

"Ether"?

MISS KAYE (*nodding "yes"*)

Or whatever the drug you are to him!—So a touch of your hand, and he's in a trance! A smile from you sets him dreaming, like laughing gas. (*With rising anger*) And a kiss, I s'pose, puts him to sleep, like knock-out drops!

MRS. TORREY (*dryly*)

If *that's* all the drug, I wonder you don't try it on him! I imagine he'd take it, with a little coaxing. (*With a change of tone*) But aren't you rather unfair to me—and to him? He's clever, attractive, ambitious to get the best in the world; and I mean to help him on. What could you give him? (*Looks in mirror of vanity-case*)

MISS KAYE

Just as good as you, and then some!—if it comes to that. Silky things and furs and almond-cream

are very nice. But you can do a lot with fresh air and Fairy soap. And I'd give him all the best that's in a woman—not the worst. And if I ever tired of him—and that can happen to any of us!—why, I'd quit and get out, and not go on taking his money and his love and devotion and give him back nothing but—street-mud! I wouldn't let him make a queen, an idol, of me, while I made a monkey of him!

MRS. TORREY (*laughing at her, but with no show of malice*)

You poor thing! You have it bad! But I can understand. He's a dear boy.—And having him about you all the time—you can't help loving him. Any woman would be—interested.

MISS KAYE (*derisively*)

"Interested"? How long? One month? Two? Three, at the most. That's your limit! You change with the seasons: Newport—Lenox—White Sulphur—Palm Beach—Town!—And in between—excursions—like this one, now, with a chap you'll "cut" on the street long before the Spring hats come in.

MRS. TORREY

That's only a few weeks off; they're showing models now.—Can't you wait that long?—You're very impatient all of a sudden—now that you think I care for him.

MISS KAYE (*derisively*)

"Care for him"! Just now it was "interested"! Why not come out with it? Say you're in love with him!

MRS. TORREY (*amused*)

Love's a very serious word. And I've only come to care for him since—— (*Uncertain*)

MISS KAYE

Since when—do you “care for him”? Since that Paris painter finished your portrait? Since the private theatricals coached by the handsome actor, whose wife made a scene that wasn't in the play? Or since you learned the latest dance steps from that——

MRS. TORREY (*breaking in, angrily*)

I s'pose you've told Mr. Farren all these—slanders!

MISS KAYE

I'd die before I'd let on—or use such means—or even mention *Mr. Torrey's Wife* to him. But don't you suppose Tom's heard—things?

MRS. TORREY (*lightly*)

Nothing I haven't told him. And if you think *that* would stop him——

MISS KAYE (*with a smile, rather bitter*)

I'm not such a fool—to think *that* would stop him! That's how you keep them going.

MRS. TORREY

How old are you?

MISS KAYE

Nineteen.

MRS. TORREY

You know a lot for an unmarried woman.

MISS KAYE

I've always worked for married men.

MRS. TORREY

I know one you won't work for—after this. You can't remain here, Miss Kaye.

MISS KAYE

I shouldn't wish to. You'd make my life a torture,

and your own a scandal. Even now you put your good name at the mercy of every gabbling 'phone-girl in the building. You'd risk even more than you did to-day, now that you know what Tom Farren means to me.

MRS. TORREY (*loftily*)

Don't flatter yourself!

MISS KAYE

Why, that's half the game for you—the *best* half! 'Tisn't so much the man you're after—nor your own happiness—but just the joy of making some other woman wretched. You're like a spoiled, vicious child, with a dish of cake before it. You're not content with mouth and hands and pockets full—but you must snatch a bite out of everybody else's share—and then throw it on the floor!—Take all you choose from other people—but hands off mine! For *me*, there's only *one* slice of cake in the world—and I won't have it mussed up!

MRS. TORREY

You *are* fussy—over your “cookie”!—Where's your pride and womanhood? You're nothing to him! He was ready enough—you saw—to go on this “excursion”!

MISS KAYE

Mr. Torrey's orders—he couldn't get out of it!

MRS. TORREY

He can *now*, if he chooses. And he *shall* choose! The moment he comes in, I'll tell him——

MISS KAYE (*panicky*)

No!

MRS. TORREY (*continuing*)

Just what you've told me—"cake" and all.

MISS KAYE (*in tone of appeal*)

You wouldn't dare!

MRS. TORREY

Wait and see!

MISS KAYE

No, I won't. (*Crosses to exit left*) (*Brokenly*) Do as you like—and he, too! Go or stay—I'm done—— (*Makes to exit*)

MRS. TORREY (*blocking the way*)

You can't go now, Miss Kaye. And don't faint, please! He'll be here any moment—and now it's up to him, alone! (*At the top of the quarrel, Torrey re-enters, followed by Farren. Mrs. Torrey rushes eagerly to her husband, nestles against him, as if for support*) Felix, dear.

TORREY

What is it? What's wrong?

MRS. TORREY

Why, that young person forgot her place. I—I didn't want to go to New York *alone*—without you—and she was insisting I *must*!

MISS KAYE

Only because you advised it, sir.

TORREY

Quite right, Miss Kaye. (*To Mrs. Torrey*) But we're going together—as we arranged.—Judge Latham fixed matters easily. They 'phoned from the hospital the man isn't badly hurt at all. Was only stunned—and has come to his senses.

MISS KAYE

Didn't have far to go (*with deferential nod toward Mrs. Torrey*) if he'd make *such* a mistake.

TORREY

Says, of course, he thought he knew you.

MRS. TORREY

They always say that—the beasts!

TORREY (*to his wife*)

Took you for one of his former pupils.

MRS. TORREY

A dancer?

TORREY

No; he's a riding-master, from Palm Beach. And seems not such a bad sort, after all. Swears he can't recall a thing that happened—except that he was kicked by a horse. Admits he only got what he deserved, and begs the lady will forgive him.

MRS. TORREY (*indignant*)

I? Never! After what I've gone through because of him. (*As she makes to exit, with husband*) Happy New Year, Miss Kaye. (*Husband nudges her and nods toward Tom*) Oh—and you, too, Mister—er—Tomkins.

TORREY (*correcting*)

Farren!

MRS. TORREY

Yes, of course. And I meant he should have a New Year's gift—but in the excitement to-day—— (*To Farren*) Choose something for yourself—handkerchiefs, neckties, socks, anything you like.—And have it charged to Mr. Torrey. They'll understand. (*Farren opens his mouth to speak, but only gasps,*

and bows as Mrs. Torrey and her husband exit. Farren stands dazed and mute, staring at the closed door. Likewise, Miss Kaye, silent, peers into space for some seconds)

MISS KAYE (*to herself; twinkling*)

"Didn't want to go to New York—alone—without you"!

FARREN (*turns front, rather to himself*)

Aren't they wonders?

MISS KAYE (*with rising temper*)

Oh, you're awake, are you? Out of your trance? You've come back!

FARREN

Forget it! (*Offers his hand, which she refuses indignantly*)

MISS KAYE

Never! After what I've gone through—because of you—you—you big—boob! (*Falls into chair, buries her head in her arms; and sobs*) I'm done with you—from this moment on——

FARREN

Don't, girl! There's nothing—honor bright—nothing to feel that way about. Not this evening. Wait till to-morrow—after the dance. Think of it! New Year's Night. The moon in the sky—snow on the ground—sleigh bells jingling all over the place—music and dancing—and everybody jolly and happy—except you and me! And everywhere in the world, to-night, every man and woman who love, hand in hand, heart to heart, looking into the future! And you and I—at different ends of the town—looking

out of the window.—And, gee whiz! Girl—when those chimes ring out at midnight—— (*Touches her hair caressingly*)

MISS KAYE (*suddenly alert, angrily, through her tears*)
I suppose that's how you talked to her!

FARREN (*ingenuously*)

Lord, no! She wouldn't listen to such moonshine. Why, when you really know Mrs. Torrey—she's a—a—serious woman!

MISS KAYE (*laughing through her tears*)
“Serious”—hell!

FARREN

Good! Now get on your hat.

MISS KAYE

Where we going?

FARREN (*mopping his brow*) First off—a long, cool drink. (*Holds up her chin*) Look at your eyes and nose. All het up!

MISS KAYE (*wistfully*)

There's the man of it! Breaks a girl's heart—and thinks he can fix it with an ice-cream soda! Aren't you wonders? (*She tiptoes to kiss him, draws away abruptly*) Did you kiss her to-day?

FARREN (*promptly*)

No! (*Amazed*) Kiss—Mrs. Torrey?

MISS KAYE

You've *never* kissed her?

FARREN (*shocked by the suggestion*)

Good Lord, no!

MISS KAYE (*gravely*)

Word-of-honor, Tom?

FARREN

Yes! Say you believe me!

MISS KAYE (*nods "yes"*)

I believe you—of course. (*Kisses him*) But I'm glad you lied!

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